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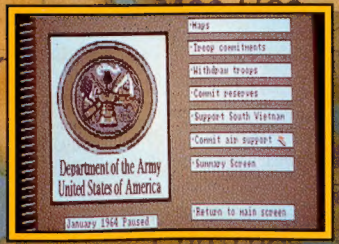

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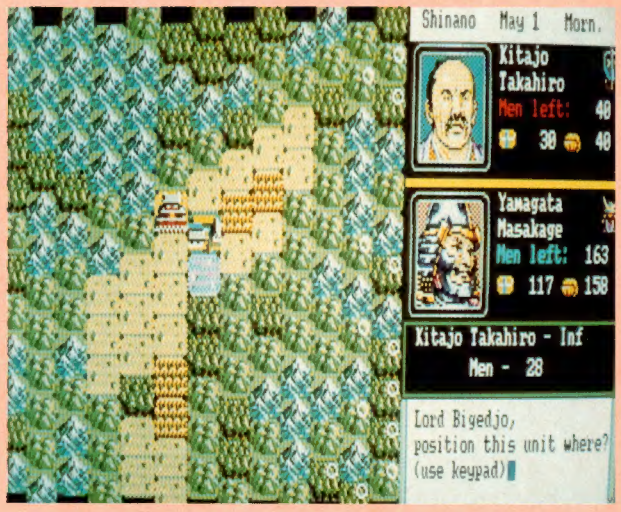

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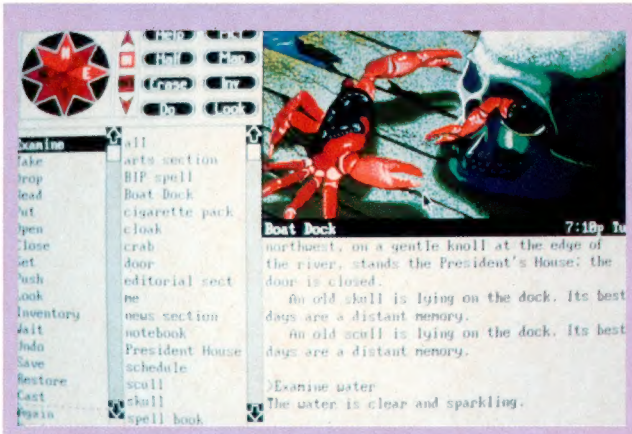
Boat Dock
7:18p
northwest, on a gentle knoll at the edge of the river, stands the President's House; the door is closed.
An old skull is lying on the dock. Its best days are a distant memory.
An old scull is lying on the dock. Its best days are a distant memory.
>Examine water
The water is clear and sparkling.

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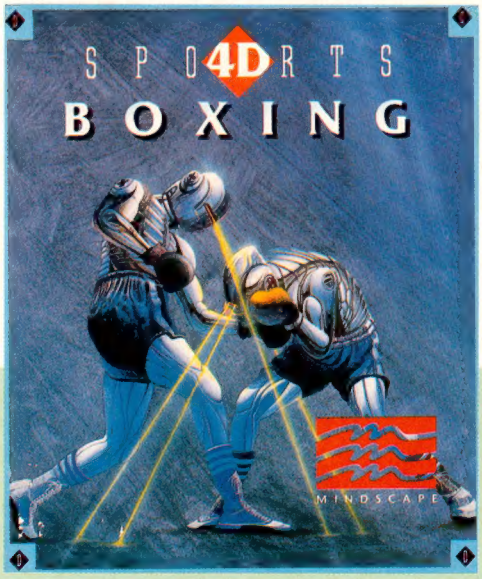

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Some of our readers, notably those in the Outer Hebrides and the Faroe Islands, have been complaining about the difficulty of finding the magazine. In the UK there are 200 000 newsagents. If we were to put three magazines in every one that would mean a print run of 600 000. A strategy game is doing well if it sells 20 000. You don't have to be Einstein to work out there is something of a discrepancy between these two figures. We are talking major pulp here. What I suggest is if you are having difficulty finding the mag then go along and visit the brave entrepreneur, otherwise known as your newsagent, and place a regular order citing the name of our distributor (Comag). To facilitate this, we have provided a coupon (somewhere in this issue) which you can complete and hand it to your favourite vendor. They are obliged to take such orders. If they refuse please notify us and we will ask our circulation manager, together with a couple of heavies, to stop by and pay him a visit.

The price isn't right

As from our next issue this magazine will cost a stonking £2.50. Why? Three reasons: 1) Inflation. 2) Eight more pages have been added. 3) Someone has to pay for my holidays in Las Vegas. The most important reason, however, I've left until last. Commencing issue #8 *Strategy Plus* will have a disk mounted on our cover. Frankly, this is something of a shotgun wedding. Because virtually all other computers magazines offer a free disk the news trade (see above) perceives this as the norm. Consequently it looks askance at any magazine that fails to conform to this practice. Having said that we are going to give it our best shot and offer games that we think will genuinely interest our readers. Being a multi format magazine presents certain problems in terms of disk compatibility. There is no way we are going to be able to please all the players all the time. So, the criteria we will be using is simply to offer what we consider to be the best available product on a given month irrespective of format. Even if you find that you are unable to use the disk that particular month, we hope that you will agree that the magazine still offers good value without it. Subscriptions will be going up from June 1 so get in quick if you want to claim the old price. Advance renewals will be accepted.

Comic relief

One of the comics, in a remarkably defensive editorial, warned their readers of magazines that were full of 'reams of opinionated waffle'. Their policy, they declared, was to keep things simple and 'let the games speak for themselves' (by virtue of printing lots of screen shots). Such an approach, if widely implemented, could revolutionise the entire reviewing industry. Food critics, for example, would no longer have to go through the tiresome process of describing what a particular dish tasted like. They wouldn't even have to eat it! They could just ask the restaurateur to supply a photograph and let the food *speak for itself*. If in doubt, they could always wheel out the clapometer: *escargot* 75%! *steak au poivre* 89%! *tarte au pomme* 90%!

Similarly, film critics could dispense with arty farty notions like post structuralism and the *auteur* theory. Instead they could just show promo clips which would *speak volumes*. This would also save them the trouble of actually going to see the films. Take *Citizen Kane* for example. The only thing the critics of the day would have needed would have been a few screen clips depicting printing presses and big houses. Couple these with a clapometer rating ('acting 51%; action; 42%; graphics 85%') and a verdict box ('bor-ring') and hey presto! You have a review. But where better to apply this radical concept than in the wearisome world of literary criticism? Books, as we all know, are absolutely choc-a-bloc with 'opinionated waffle', so who on earth would want to read essays on textual analysis and deconstruction? Of course there is a small problem here. How do you let a book 'speak for itself'? Simple. Hire an illustrator to come up with a few visuals that will enable the hitherto silent tome to not so much *speak for itself*, but to positively *shout from the rooftops*. Just like a comic, in fact. Words: who needs 'em? SP

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Distributors:
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Tavistock Rd, West Drayton, Middx UB7 7QE
Tel: 0895 444055

Worldwide
T G Hamilton Wholesale
Tel: 021-788 3112

North America
British Magazine Distributors
Tel: 0101 519 421 1285

Imagesetter
First Page
Rembrandt House, Whippendell Road,
Watford, Herts WD1 7PJ
Tel: 0923 248017 & 50376

Printer
Visa Press Limited
12 Campbell Court, Bramley,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG26 5EG
Tel: 0256 882131

STRATEGY PLUS is published by Foxray Ltd. Reg No 2270529. VAT No 495 4478 93.

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SCRABBLE DE LUXE

Word Up

by Brian Walker

OLD GAMES never die, it seems: they just come back as Virgins. **Scrabble** has never really been away and, as the world's definitive word game, it is likely to be around as long as words are spoken. This is the second software manifestation of the game. Both appeared on the Virgin Mastertronic label. Even to mention the first version in the same breath as this latest offering is a kind of aesthetic crime. The title extension **De Luxe** sums it up, for this is an excellent implementation, but one not entirely without problems.

Cornucopia

The first thing to catch the eye is the vast number of features offered. these include a timer, 2 meg on-board *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary* (the American version contains the *Official Scrabble Player Dictionary*, which the British **Scrabble** players refuse to recognise, as the manual somewhat tersely points out). The dictionary, if loaded, allows a 'define' option – handy if you don't know what a 'qua' is. It is also possible to create a 'personal dictionary'. This allows the insertion of words the existence of which you are certain, even if the dictionary isn't.

El Tell

The anagram and crossword options are a sort of 'cheat' – the computer will scan the dictionary for matches to your letters. Similarly, there is also a 'hint' option. None of these should really be allowed in competitive play, but one function that is of practical use in most situations is the 'juggle' option whereby the computer will scramble the tiles that are being held, thus presenting a 'new' way of looking at them. In short, the program is a lexicologist's dream.

Joystick, keyboard, and mouse interfaces are possible but the latter is recommended – just point and drag. The options are accessed from pull-down menus. In the 2-4 player mode, there are considerable advantages over the boardgame. The timer is extremely useful if only for curtailing those *longeurs* that occur when your opponent doesn't know what to do with his 'q', while arguments over whether 'el' is an acceptable term (it is) are quickly cut short by the dictionary.

The only nit here is the lack of a pause between turns. This makes it rather too easy to see your opponent's rack as you switch places. As ever, the computer opponent is a problem. 'What?' you say, 'With a 2 meg dictionary at its disposal?' 'Fraid so. In the early game the beast steams in with words dredged up from the libraries of arcania. That, of course, is when the board is open. As time goes by and the playing area gets closed up, the creature becomes confused. In the end game it just gives up altogether and makes injudicious passes.

The problem is one of spatial recognition. It appears to be unable to target double or triple word squares with the same alacrity as a human. This may have something to do with the 'weighting' system that the program uses. With this the player can adjust the 'weight' of a letter. Apparently this provides the AI with a sort of priority guide for that letter. Unfortunately the photocopied manual was somewhat vague on this point, though doubtless this will be rectified in the finished version.

I consider myself only a slightly better than average player (top score against the machine: 347) yet I was able to beat it on the top level each time, though sometimes there were just a couple of points in it. Despite this (or because of it?) it was undeniably fun to play and that's what counts. The VGA graphics were very easy on the eye, and the overall impression was that considerable effort had gone into making the program the best possible. There are not many software games that you can finish in just over an hour, and get a reasonable challenge. **Scrabble De Luxe Challenge** has just joined that *rig unit queen hag* (anag 6,9). SP

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Review based on the 1.0 American version

BETRAYAL

Barbarians and backstabbers

by John Scott

BETRAYAL is the perfect name for this game. I know, because I've just been totally stitched up by the so-called White Knight. I thought we had quite a nice little alliance going together, but just when I needed him most, he proved that there is no such thing as honour among knights. Oh well, I don't mind...

Duke or Earl

Betrayal is a game for four players, each of whom can be either computer or human controlled. Players may also be of differing ranks (knight, baron, earl or duke), and in theory the higher the rank chosen the easier it will be to achieve victory. In practice this is not quite the case, as the artificial intelligence of the computer players is quite good, and just like human players they are apt to gang up on whoever seems to be leading the field. We found that the ranks were mainly useful in providing a handicap system when all the players were human.

The game is set in the fantasy world of the Western Marches, and the aim is, as always, complete domination of the area. In many games this is achieved by military conquest alone, but **Betrayal** is considerably more subtle than this. At the beginning of the game the land is ruled by the two powers of Church and State, headed by the Bishop and the King respectively.

In addition to ruling over several villages in the Marches each player also has a number of courtiers at the courts of the King and Bishop. These courtiers represent the player's influence at the twin seats of power. Each court can accommodate 24 courtiers altogether, and a player's true standing in the game can be measured by the number of courtiers he has at court. In fact, if a player has an overall majority at one of the courts he can attempt to overthrow the King or Bishop and set up a puppet ruler in his place. When a player successfully deposes both King and Bishop he becomes overall ruler of the Western Marches and has won the game.

None of this is as easy as it sounds. In order to get an outright majority at court it is usually necessary not only to place more men there, but also to create vacancies among the opposition. Getting a courtier installed is reasonably easy. Both Bishop and King expect their underlings to pay taxes, and if the amount offered is too low they're quick to show their displeasure by awarding a few courtiers the order of the boot! If the tax received is barely acceptable (ie one tax unit per courtier present at court), the courtiers are allowed to stay, and if the tax is specially pleasing then extra courtiers will be installed.

A Taxing Business

At first it looks as if an extra courtier is gained per extra tax unit given, but this will not last. Neither King nor Bishop are fools. They know that once a player acquires an outright majority at court they may attempt to stage a coup, so they will become increasingly unwilling to appoint extra courtiers, and more and more tax will be needed to win their favours. This brings me to the nasty business of collecting taxes. Each of a player's villages will have a number of farmers and craftsmen producing crops and pots for sale. Once each year when a knight visits the village he may harvest it. This will aid his personal funds and, even more importantly, this is how he levies taxes for his temporal and spiritual masters.

Careful management of the villages is necessary – if pots are bringing in twice as much cash as crops then a prudent manager will decide to cut down on the number of farmers and add a few craftsmen.

Sometimes the harvest will be bad; even skimming off one miserable tax unit will then create real hardship for the poor plebs who have to struggle on for another year. This can lead to serious population decline among farmers, craftsmen, and the militia. Should the player wish to maintain or increase the population levels in hard times he will have to dip into his own private funds.

If a village is worth keeping it will be important to keep the militia at a high level, otherwise other players will simply ride in and conquer the place, either harvesting it as their own or razing it altogether. It is also possible to set a toll which other players must pay if they want to ride through, though this can be risky, as too high a toll may provoke a battle.

Tyranno Vex

Villagers sometimes get a bit grumpy at being used as pawns in their master's struggle for power. In order to stop them defecting to the banner of an opposing knight it may sometimes be necessary to put the fear of God into them. This is accomplished by putting a few of them in the stocks as an example to their fellows, and in game terms this means increasing the knight's tyranny level in the village. Alas, it is possible to overdo it and be

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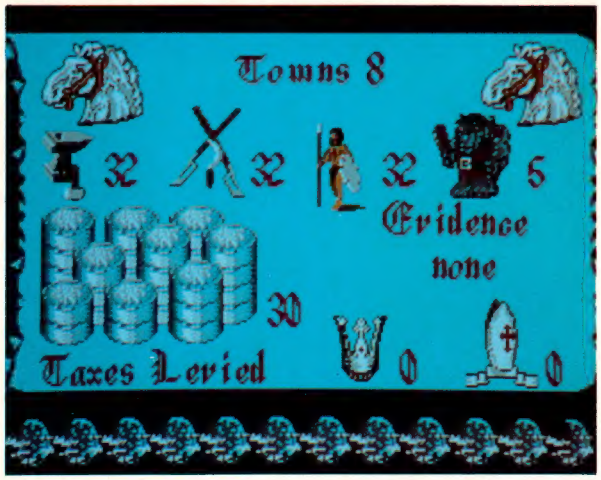

such a tyrant that they rebel regardless of the consequences. When a knight rides through an enemy town he may decide to come in peace (or pay toll) or to engage in war. For example, I could have captured lots of the White Knight's towns, but I didn't because of our alliance. This is why it was particularly galling to be backstabbed by the sneaky git. Not that I mind, honestly...

Trial By Combat

Battles, when they happen, offer an optional arcade type of sequence, which features an interesting range of choices. It can be turned off completely, or the computer can be left to fight the actual battle while the player selects the order in which to send in the troops (swordsmen, ball and chain wielders, axemen, or trolls), or the player can elect for complete control, down to the joystick waggling individual swipe of the sword.

This combat section offers the best sound. Generally the graphics are pretty average. Combat may be against a village or another Knight. In either case, the loser's personal troops will be more or less wiped out, and much, much worse, he will be captured. Being captured is a real pain in the lower spinal region, as a captured knight is effectively out of the game for a while. Each turn he may do nothing except try to escape (or pay a ransom, should one be set). This means no tax gathering, no payment for the rulers, and bad news for his courtiers at the end of the tax year. Assuming that he manages to avoid defeat and capture, the years will be spent largely in the business of harvesting and payment.

Each month the knight has six moves travelling around the Marches or one action at Court. Movement around the countryside can be quite tricky – it's easy to get lost and spend precious moves wandering around the wilderness. It's also possible to find cash lying around, or useful evidence against another player, and you may be attacked by barbarians who will have to be bribed or fought off.

Ba Ba Bribes

The real fun of the game happens at court, where taxes are paid. Here it is possible to hire an assassin to kill an enemy courtier, or a spy to uncover evidence of his heresy or treason. Also, evidence may be purchased and used in the attempt to have an opponent's courtier denounced or executed. Finally, this is where one may attempt to depose a King or Bishop.

When an accusation of treason or heresy is made, all Knights are called to present evidence for or against the accused. This is how I managed to save the White Knight's miserable skin when the Blue Knight charged him with treason. I presented my evidence against Blue, Blue had two courtiers executed, and White left the court a free man. A few turns later Blue accused me of treason, and White added *more* evidence against me, decimating my influence at the Bishop's Court. But I don't mind. It's just a game, and I'm a big enough man to take it...

Unspecial Effects

Betrayal is carefully thought out and basically well designed. It is also sufficiently complex to warrant further examination. The glossy manual is well over one hundred pages long – unfortunately the first thirty-odd of these consist of yet another of these godawful novellas which are utterly tedious to plough through, but which one feels obliged to read just in case it contains vital clues.

One or two other quibbles – there are some slightly time consuming effects in the game which are pretty, but over the course of very many turns make the game considerably slower. On the other hand, the vitally important text which appears during the court sequences flies past faster than the credits at the end of an American TV show. Small points, but annoying enough to affect the replay potential of the game.

Actually, now I think about it, I *am* bloody annoyed at that White Knight. This time he'd better watch his back... SP

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ESCAPE FROM COLDITZ

Solitary Refinement

by George Crawshay

HAVE YOU ever eagerly unwrapped your latest computer game only to feel your heart sinking under the weight of the book telling you how to play it? Have you perhaps struggled, eyes dancing between screen, keyboard and book, fingers trying to control mouse, keyboard and pages, and wishing you had an extra supply of eyes, digits and brain cells to cope with it all? If so, you will probably hear with relief that the instructions for **Escape from Colditz** consume less than 300 words, which is little more than one third the length of this review.

German Mass

With one or two reservations this economy of verbiage is sensible, since the game, which is for solitaire play only, is simple and straightforward in concept. The player controls four prisoners of different nationality (British, French, American and Polish). The objective is to manage successful escapes for as many of them as possible within the span of a day.

To help in this aim there are various objects lying around – keys of different types in particular, candles, tools, passes and so on, and an extremely rudimentary map. Working against this objective are a mass of German guards who can be trigger-happy at times, the complexity of dealing with hundreds of different locations many of which are out of bounds and the knowledge that the clock is ticking away relentlessly.

Movement of prisoners and usage of keys and tools is by joystick, the keyboard being used to select the prisoner and vary his speed (walking or running) and to make him pick things up or put them down. The action and scenario are three dimensional with full scrolling facility and the graphics are clear and pleasing. After several hours spent with pencil and squared paper I can vouch for the claim that the layout of the castle is followed with complete accuracy.

The Great Escape

I mentioned earlier some reservations about the otherwise admirable brevity of the rule book; for instance, on the screen there is at the bottom the word 'Fatigue' followed by an incomprehensible graphic. This seems to imply that prisoners get tired in their constant quest for freedom, but so far I have been unable to fathom out this aspect. Indeed, sometimes in certain rooms they appear to be walking through treacle despite being on their first main sortie of the day, suddenly speeding up when leaving them.

Another example: a small panel shows the status of each prisoner – normal, in solitary confinement or dead. 'Solitary' shows a face behind bars, but occasionally a face is shown with bars flashing on and off. Does this mean that that prisoner is in danger of capture or that he is infringing regulations, or what? Your guess is as good as mine.

There is also the question of forbidden areas; it is not at all clear at what places and times a prisoner is vulnerable to capture and either banishment to solitary or abrupt termination. As to the point of the player's objective, I have postulated one above, but all that the rules say is '...it's up to you to guide them to freedom'. No mention of quantity or time limit.

While I am all in favour of being left to use one's own initiative in developing knowledge in this type of game, I feel that just a little more information is required on certain aspects.

Paper Chase

Like many similar games involving rooms and passages, to play this properly requires a good deal of time and patience. Unless you have a photographic memory and a remarkable bump of location the squared paper routine is essential, especially as you will soon discover that cooperation between prisoners is necessary to ensure optimum use of keys which are initially distributed in far from ideal locations.

You do, however, have the advantage that there is no random factor involved – the objects always start in the same places, which means of course that by judicious use of Pause and Reset you can try numerous options and explorations. Some gamers might feel that this makes the contest rather mechanical, but in this case it is arguable that there is already enough challenge in getting objects and men where you want them that random placement would destroy any chance of proper strategic planning.

If you are expecting lots of specific hints on strategy, forget it. For one thing it is contrary to the spirit of a game of discovery to provide short cuts, for another I have to admit to my shame that despite having penetrated and mapped at least 80% of the castle I have yet to find either a pickaxe, a shovel, a stone or a German uniform, all of which the rules assure us are around somewhere. All I will say is: get to know the courtyard layout well and make sure you use the exercise period to full advantage, otherwise inter-prisoner visits and transfers will prove pretty difficult. Happy escaping! SP

Published by
Digital Magic

Price £29.99

Available for the
Amiga
ST version to follow

NOBUNAGA'S AMBITION 2

Big In Japan

by Brian Walker

NOBUNAGA'S Ambition 2? What, you are probably saying, happened to **Nobunaga's Ambition 1**? Despite being the subject of the world's best selling strategy game, Nobby (as he is known colloquially) never made it to the UK. But no matter, for the sequel contains all the elements that made the original so popular and adds a few enhancements for good measure.

Screen Shorts

The action takes place in divided Japan of the 16th century with the eponymous daimyo setting out to unite the country. Two scenarios are provided: Warlord Rivalry and the title itself. The main difference between the two is the number of daimyos present in each. In both scenarios the objective is the same: the reunification of Japan. Although two scenarios might sound stingy, in truth it is more than enough. By selecting a different starting fief each game infinite strategies present themselves.

The game can accommodate up to four players and for once this is not wishful thinking. The time spent at the screen is comparatively short, thus enabling the game to progress at an acceptable pace. Also, the elimination aspect present in the first game has now been reduced. The player is now allowed to appoint up to two successors when his daimyos die providing he has at least one samurai under his command.

The structure of the game is one turn per month per fief controlled. Within a turn the player may issue as many commands as he chooses provided sufficient 'body points' (of which more later) are available. The command system is the one that Koei have used in all their games, and here they have refined it to perfection. The player is presented with a menu consisting of eight possible commands. Each of these leads into another menu of sub commands. Altogether there are about forty options, enough to provide a feeling of control without being overwhelming.

The strategy, as in all games of conquest, is to build up a solid home base before going a-conquering. In ancient Japan, this involves rather more than making a few bob on the stock market and then building up an arsenal. For example, in March a tax rate must be set. The actual amount collected is dependent on the trade, culture, and support values in that fief. In September 'tribute' in the form of food must be paid. The rates of both the tribute and the tax rate will affect the popularity of the daimyo. One of the keys to success in the game is understanding the nature of body points, a minimum number of which are required to issue all commands. Every month these are replenished. The exact amount is dependent on the samurai's political influence, which in turn can be increased via the 'train' command.

Combined Harvesters

Eventually there will come a time when you'll want to do something with the large army that is eating its way through your harvest every year. The 'something' usually turns out to be invading a neighbouring fief. The main screen then switches to a tactical display of the fief being disputed, overlaid with a hex grid. The combat system is basically quite simple, yet still allows for complex strategies. This has been considerably refined from the earlier game; now, when a castle is attacked the screen switches to a siege mode. Before a castle can be entered the gates must be stormed.

The units consist of cavalry (who may charge) and rifle units. No algorithms are provided as to how combat is actually resolved, much appears to rest on the strength of the leader. Each 'war' may only last a month. Care must be taken to ensure there are enough food supplies for the troops. Terrain must also be carefully noted because of its effect on mobility.

If another fief is captured the player has the choice of directly controlling it or appointing a computer controlled governor. In the early and middle stages of the game it is advisable to opt for direct control, but in the latter stages it might be worth risking the somewhat whimsical strategies of the cyborgs for the sake of convenience – issuing commands to what by now is large number of fiefs is quite a task.

Fief Of Fate

The presentation of **Nobunaga's Ambition II** is immaculate. In addition to the command summary card, there is a colour map depicting all the fiefs in the game, plus a section allowing notes to be kept on vital data. The high gloss manual is a top quality production which contains extensive historical notes, as well as providing valuable insights into the game mechanics. The graphics stretch EGA to the limits – they are not exactly blocky, but the resolution could do with improvement. This is the only fault in what is otherwise a flawless game.

For strategists this fits into the 'must buy' category, but role-players should give Nobby careful consideration. The game system, with its clever use of body points, encourages acting 'in character'. If Oda Nobunaga's ambition was to have a top quality game made of his exploits, then his spirit must have finally been at peace the day this was released. SP

Designed by
'Kou Shibusawa'

Published by
Koei/ Infogrames

Price £39.99

Available for the PC
Amiga version to
follow

EGA

Keyboard interface

Review based on the
Koei game. Packaging
of the Infogrames
version may differ

FEUDAL LORDS

A Green And Pleasant Land

by John Harrington

IF YOU are bored with building empires in space, try stepping back in time to the mythical realm of Euthrania and beating up a few peasants. As one of four lords you must conquer the whole land and thereby win the hand, plus the rest of the bodily parts, of the beautiful Princess Maria. Success depends not only on military ability, but also on skill in nurturing an economy capable of building a supreme war machine.

The Land Of Bland

Euthrania is a rather blandly depicted area consisting of 25 regions. The four lords, who may be computer or human controlled, start off in their home provinces, conveniently situated in far flung corners of the land. All other regions are neutral at the start of the game. Play proceeds in seasons, with each lord only able to perform a certain number of actions each season. In Spring and Autumn, a lord's options are restricted to: i) assessing the strengths & weaknesses of regions, ii) carrying out military operations and iii) indulging in a bit of diplomacy. In summer, the diplomacy element is replaced by an option to manage the economy.

Any region may be inspected for free in a player's turn and this is done by clicking first on a menu item and then on the region you wish to examine. However, if the region is neutral or controlled by another player only non-military information is obtained, such as population level, amount of arable land, number of merchants and clergy. Thus this option is useful for determining which regions are worth annexing but it does not prevent rude surprises in the form of a massively powerful defensive force if a marauding army moves in.

Turnip Bush

Once a decision has been reached on a region you are interested in controlling, attention should be turned to military matters. Military invasions may only be launched from adjoining provinces, in traditional **Risk** fashion, and are carried out by the mobile army, which may consist of knights, soldiers and bowmen. Knights are ten times better than soldiers in battle, and are consequently in short supply, but are not much use in castle sieges. Bowmen are very valuable in sieges, whether in a defensive or attacking capacity, but are only half as effective as soldiers in field battles.

As the German and Japanese governments learned recently when George Bush sent round the collecting tin, troops cost money. In **Feudal Lords**, bowmen cost twice as much as soldiers while knights cannot be purchased at any cost; instead, a certain number of your soldiers evolve each summer into knights.

The number of soldiers or bowmen available is only constrained by wealth (including overdraft facility) and the amount of iron purchased in the summer season. Iron is necessary to arm troops, as even the most highly trained knight is not that lethal brandishing a turnip. The problem with purchasing troops, apart from the fact that they cost a lot to feed, is that they are always recruited in home regions, while mobile armies may be five or six regions away from home base. Garrisoned troops have no ability to move from region to region, so if new troops are to join a strike force the mobile army has to be moved back home to pick them up.

Except when two large mobile armies clash in the field, battle resolution is a brisk affair. The disk drive grinds away for a second or two and then the result is flashed up on the screen, together with the number of casualties suffered by both sides.

Confrontation between large forces is a more involved affair with the factions lining up opposite each other in three groups, but in keeping with the mood of the game it still fails to qualify as a visual extravaganza. Prior to the battle a decision must be made regarding the composition of the troops in each group. For instance, the might comprise predominantly bowmen on the flanks and soldiers and knights in the centre group.

The animated battle sequence resembles the line of scrimmage in an American football match, with opposing groups seeking to push each other back. The football analogy is reinforced by the presence of reserve troops sitting on the substitutes' bench on the sidelines. These reserve troops may be pitched into the fray as casualties are suffered. It is quite often a good tactic to hold back your knights in reserve for a strong charge late in the battle, after your bowmen have softened up the enemy.

Deployment of reserve forces is carried out in real-time and gives the game a change of pace as generals seek to exploit their opponent's weaknesses or shore up their own defensive line. If all else fails you can do a Saddam Hussein and order a retreat while you still have an army worthy of the name.

Non Binding Force

For players of a less overtly violent nature the game includes a diplomatic element. This is handled reasonably well, considering the game design

Designed by
Jacek Bochenski

Published by
Impressions

Price £24.99

Available for the
Amiga and ST
Reviewed on the STE

3D CONSTRUCTION KIT

BUILD YOUR OWN VIRTUAL REALITY

It's a simple, effective way to design a detailed environment (house, garden, village, ship, car etc. etc.) and then look around it to make sure you like the look of it from every angle.

There are environments through environments. For instance, the house has rooms, the rooms have furniture, a chest of drawers has compartments, the compartments have secret boxes, the boxes have ..... etc. etc.

It's up to you. The limit is your imagination. Use it for school – or to show Mum how to re-arrange the living room. Dad might be interested in how the garden would look if it were laid out differently – with a new pool? And how would the neighbours see it from their angle? It's easy! Just spin it round!

This is probably one of the most expensive pieces of software you'll buy this year – but *at last* you can make your computer really show it's potential.

"There's no doubt about it, this could be the most impressive game creation utility ever released.

Not only does it allow you to create run-time modules complete with animation, shoot-em-up compatibility, puzzle solving and maze-exploration – but it enables you to do it in solid 3D, using a system that's even better than Freescape!"

ACE - FEB 91

"3D Construction Kit gives newcomers and non-programmers the power to create solid 3D objects that can be stretched, rotated, suspended, stacked and even given animation effects. Yet the whole system is so user-friendly that it makes most simple art packages look cumbersome."

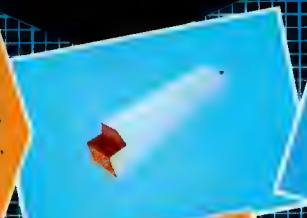
ST FORMAT - FEB 91

"Build your own virtual reality, but don't be misled. This is **not** a boffins only product. I've produced a special video included in the pack which shows you how to do it – and helps get you off to a flying start. After that it's simple and in no time you'll be impressing everyone with 'magical' designs on your computer!"

IAN ANDREW, INCENTIVE

PIERRE TAYLOR (28) – PORTSMOUTH.

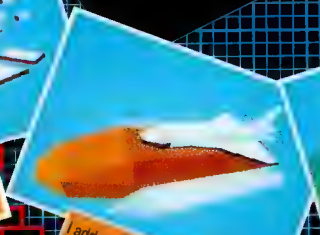
I own a car company, but my real love has always been the idea of space travel. I've often played around with art packages but what I really wanted to do was to design a spacecraft once, then bring it to life and walk around it. This incredible package allows someone like me, who knows very little about computers, to do it easily!



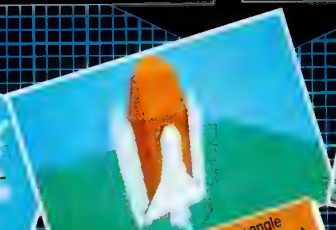
First I put together a couple of blocks to make the fuselage.

Next I added the cockpit and the nose.

Adding detail was easy. I only needed to design one wing, then used the copy, flip and rotate feature to produce the other one.



I added the fuel tank and boosters.



I can now view it from any angle and manipulate it as a single object.

This is a head on view, showing the control panel which enabled me to do it. Not bad eh? Pretty good for a beginner.

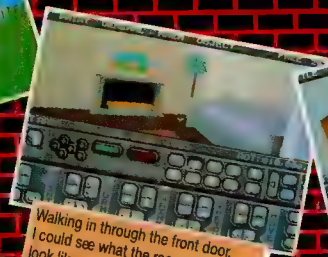
PAUL BUCHANAN (22) – EALING – TRANSPORT ECONOMIST.

I've always wanted to design my own house, but I could never really visualise what it would look like once it was built. What would it look like from above? Or from the side? Or what if I wanted to walk through the front door and arrange the furniture? With this marvellous software package, I can do all the things and make my dream house come true.

To start with I put up three simple walls.

Then I made a roof and lowered it down.

I added windows, a picket fence and the first tree in my garden. But the interesting bit was yet to come...



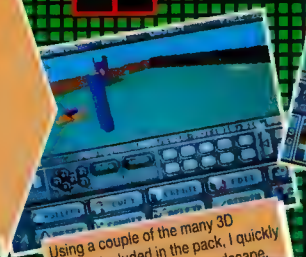
Walking in through the front door, I could see what the rooms would look like.

And using the simple control panel, I could design the furniture and move it around.

Home, sweet home!

CHRIS HALL (15) – STUDENT – YORKSHIRE.

I loved Castle Master and wanted to make a similar game myself. I had plenty of ideas but no way of bringing them to life. After all I'm not a programmer.



Using a couple of the many 3D objects included in the pack, I quickly designed my own game landscape.

I wanted to give the game a particular style. This was easily done by using the excellent colouring and shading facilities.

Then I set up some of the conditions which could make the game truly interactive.

Using the simple pull down menus and on screen prompts designing a great game was a doddle – I could even have strength and time bars!

Finally, I dropped in a control panel from several included (although I could have made up my own).

I've sent the finished game to my cousin in Wales. He hasn't got 3D Construction Kit yet ... I reckon it won't be long before he gets a copy.

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incentive
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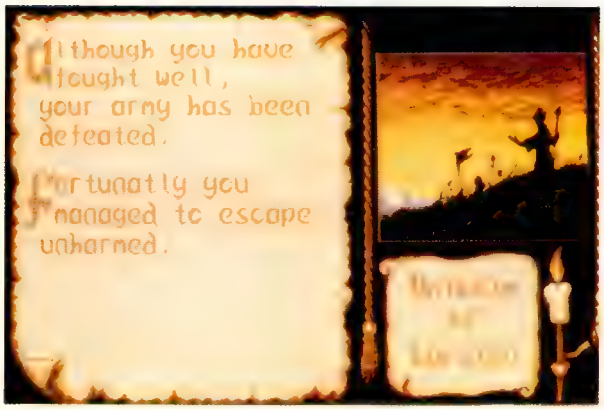
had to take into consideration the inherent inability of computer-controlled players to negotiate.

The diplomatic options include assassination attempts, subversion and non-aggression pacts. The success of assassination attempts is determined by the competence of the assassins hired for the job (ie you get what you pay for) versus the number of bodyguards in the retinue of the intended victim. Subversion takes the form of attempts to bribe a region's loyalty away from its current lord and master. Again, spending lots of money improves the chances of success, and it also more probable that fringe regions will succumb to the bribery than will provinces close to the lord's homeland.



Non-aggression pacts are always of finite duration (although they may of course be extended if both parties agree) and are binding. They enable troops to move into their allies' regions without provoking a battle. The signing of pacts between two human-controlled lords is fairly straightforward but an alliance between a human and a computer-controlled lord may take some time to negotiate. The rules give precious little advice on what would make a computer-controlled lord amenable to an alliance, and at times it is frustrating trying to persuade the computer to unite and 'hit the leader'.

Up the Poll

Summer is the crucial season of the game. Revenue from direct taxation, including the topically unpopular Poll Tax, is received in summer, as are the fruits of the harvest. Depending on the number of peasants working the land, how much arable land is possessed plus of course how good the harvest was, a lord may or may not have enough grain to feed his troops and subjects. Additionally, a certain amount of wine may be produced.

The economic phase of the game takes place only in summer and a lord may optionally seek to buy or sell wine, grain or iron. Selling wine lessens a lord's popularity while flogging off your grain so as to buy more weapons for your troops does not go down too well with the hoi polloi either if people are starving.

However, such callous decisions occasionally need to be taken if a lord is to gain dominion over the whole land – and they are only peasants after all. However, dead peasants are notoriously bad at breeding, and if the population shrinks so does the economy.

If a lord is really bent on upsetting his people he can increase taxes and duties in the economic phase. He may also instruct his tax collectors to be more rigorous in their duties, which will increase revenues but might lead to a mass defection by the merchants, the peasants and even the troops (if their pay is cut).

Wishy-washy Liberal Democrats and *laissez faire* free traders will be relieved to know that it is just as easy to cut taxes and duties, and to go easy on the tax collection. What is lost in tax revenues may be gained in duties from a thriving economy, particularly if the tax breaks encourage merchants and peasants to migrate from other empires.

Hardcore Pawn

The management of the economy increases in importance during the period of consolidation that usually follows the early expansion phase, and it is important to fine tune the economy so as to be able to build up the military side. As well as fiddling around with taxes or trading in commodities, a lord may invest in things such as markets, crafts, castles and churches. Markets and crafts attract merchants to a region which should, of course, lead to more income which can then be invested in more markets. Castles are good for defence and are best built in regions where there is a lot of 'industry' and markets, while churches placate the masses and encourage the peasants to go forth and multiply.

War, of course, is just commerce taken to its illogical extreme and in most cases victory will be achieved by the old fashioned method of having a bigger stick than the other guy. Military strategy in **Feudal Lords** is not complex or realistic enough to appeal to the hardcore wargamer but it is a tricky thing to master and I for one can do without the brainache brought about by maintaining supply lines or dealing with bureaucratic command structures.

The concept of just one unit – the 'mobile army' – being able to launch attacks makes the strategy different to other simplistic multi-player wargames, where the usual tactic is to shunt all the troops to the front line regions. In this game, spreading troops in garrisons along the front line just leaves them weak enough to be turned over by an opponent's mobile army. Better to leave the regions undefended and concentrate forces in the mobile army. The ultimate aim should be to engage an opponent's mobile army and defeat him, which should then leave his home province there for the taking (losing the home province results in elimination).

Out In The Field

This game has a lot of good features, all of which are individually easy to grasp but which together form an absorbing and challenging experience. It is the best way yet of conquering a green and peasant land, but it is not without fault. Chief among these is the absence of a save game feature – an omission I find staggering, given that a game can last three or four hours if you play well (or less than thirty minutes if you are eliminated quickly!).

The rule book is spartan, and while the game system can largely be learned intuitively, it would have been nice to have had more information about the effects of the various economic actions available. It would also have been useful to have had a print facility. This should be compulsory in hidden movement multi-player games to reduce the amount of downtime suffered by the players waiting their turn at the computer.

The fact that **Feudal Lords** is an elimination game only increases the prospect of one or more players catching up on their newspaper reading while waiting for the other players to finish. Despite these reservations I would recommend **Feudal Lords** to the sort of people who liked **Nobunaga's Ambition**, but would advise members of the Campaign for Real Wargames to look elsewhere for a dose of brainache. SP

WORLDS AT WAR

A Space Odyssey

by Stuart Mitchell

WAVES OF hyperspace bombers hurl themselves at each other as the enemy fleets engage. Hypernium bombs flare in the darkness, wreaking havoc wherever they strike. Finally the attack breaks off as the final bombs are sent on their way. The surviving attackers reform and head back to their base. This attack failed, barely, to breach the enemy defences. But there is always next time...

Bon Voyage

Billed as a 'model of naval combat', **Worlds at War** is actually a two-dimensional space game. Players use 'naval' task forces to acquire neutral planets and attack the enemy. The ultimate objective is the complete destruction of the enemy. Failing that, a simple superiority in victory points is sufficient. Victory points are accrued for controlling neutral planets and for destruction of enemy forces.

Players begin with a single base planet and a pool of production points. Production points purchase the forces that will secure new worlds and destroy the enemy. Controlled neutral planets provide additional production and will become new base planets if held for ten turns. In the tradition of similar games (**Reach For The Stars**, for example), players must balance the need for expansion against the imperative to seek out and destroy the enemy.

The naval aspect of the game comes in its use of task forces. A task force is essentially a movable base which can launch and recover ships. Additionally, task forces may launch missile barrages or employ short-range guns. The player directs these task forces in much the same way that a Second World War Admiral directed carrier task forces. Scouts are sent out to find the enemy, then attacks are launched, hopefully before your own task force is detected.

Attacks are launched as some combination of bombers and missiles. These forces are moved to the enemy sector. If the enemy is still there when the attacking forces arrive, then the attack is carried out automatically. Missiles are expended, but bombers may return to their task force (or to any other friendly base or task force) for re-arming.

Bombers and scouts have endurance levels which determine how many turns they may fly in open space before they must be recovered. Failure to recover a ship before its endurance runs out will result in its destruction. Recovered ships are ready for combat again after four turns. Thus players must be careful when launching strikes. It is quite possible to have your bombers down below decks when the enemy fleet arrives for the big battle. I have discovered to my chagrin just how devastating this can be.

The way to avoid unexpected enemy attacks is through the use of scouts. In space, most ships can only detect the enemy in their own sector. Scouts, on the other hand, can detect the enemy in adjacent sectors as well. Effective use of scouts is imperative to ensure that you are not caught unawares by sudden enemy movements.

Marine Life

While roaming the galaxy in search of the enemy, it is essential to find and take neutral planets. Neutral planets accrue victory points each turn they are held as well as augmenting production. After 10 straight turns under a benevolent rule, they will become new base planets gaining a Production Point bonus in the process. To conquer these planets, it will be necessary to call in the Marines (remember, this *is* supposed to be a naval game). Marines are highly specialised forces which exist only long enough to be dropped onto neutral planets. Whether they subdue the planet or not, they are gone once the attack is over. They are best thought of as elite kamikaze attack troops.

In **Worlds At War**, space itself is

fluctuating. Each sector is rated for visibility ranging from good to fair to poor. Each turn this rating can change, affecting detection ranges for units in low visibility areas. Also, in the space map version of the game, hyperspace paths exist between each sector governing movement rates and detection ranges. These paths also change with each turn.

Square Route

Worlds At War offers several configuration options. Perhaps the most important is the map type. The space map uses separate squares for each sector. These squares are connected by hyperspace paths which vary in width. The width of these paths affects movement and detection. Moreover, these paths change each turn. The naval map uses a simple square grid. There are no hyperspace paths, so movement rates are constant.

Map size and the size of the initial production point pool may be adjusted as well. Other options include auto-scouting, hidden planets, hidden forces, and night movement. Finally, movement rates may be altered for each of the various unit types. By manipulating these options, players can dictate the pace of the game as well as its difficulty.

Play is decidedly odd at first. The rules offer a cursory tutorial, but it is

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Lyric Software

Published by
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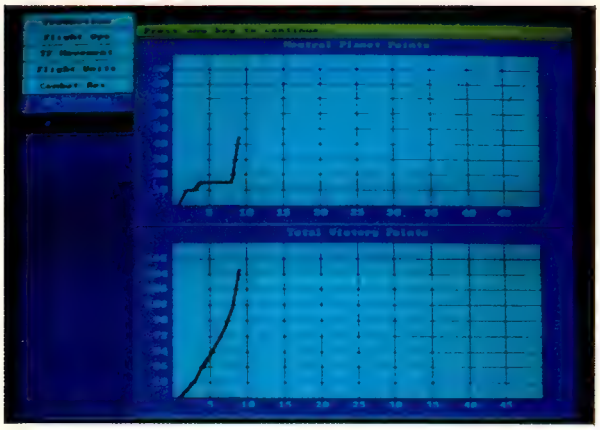

not at all clear how all the factors interact. Moreover, the tutorial does not extend far enough. Only further experimentation (or a painstaking perusal of *all* the rules) will reveal some important gotchas. For instance, marines must be landed *in* the sector they are to attack. Once launched, marines cannot be recovered, even if they were dropped by mistake.

Missile barrages must find their target the turn they are launched or suffer a similar fate. And bombers have only one *attack*, even though their endurance factor is four. Support points govern not only the number of missiles and bombers that can be held, but also the movement factor of the task force.

Still, these things *are* in the rules; you just have to read them thoroughly to find them. Once the basics of the game are grasped, play proceeds smoothly. In many ways, **Worlds At War** resembles a naval **Empire**. As in that earlier game, play is abstract. Players move forces consisting largely of numbers, coordinating diverse units towards various objectives against an implacable foe.

And, as in **Empire**, the graphic presentation can be most charitably described as chunky. In point of fact, the bulk of the game resides in various numbers and displays, and the need for spectacular graphics is small. Still, a few animated explosions and zoom-ins would have helped relieve the tedium of the square grid and force displays.

Recovery

I found the most frustrating aspect of the game was grasping the underlying system. The enemy was far less of a problem at first. Another minor obstacle to play was the interface. Players must walk through a succession of menus using the F10 key to signify they are done. If the key is hit too quickly, recovery is only possible by restoring a saved game. Also, the Enter key is used at times to signify the end of movement, while at other times F10 is required. These inconsistencies were annoying, but not insurmountable.

Once understood, the game had a surprisingly addictive quality. Each turn beckoned to new possibilities: a neutral planet to conquer, an enemy fleet to confront, a revenge to be plotted. The computer opponent was adequate, though once adversity struck, it tended to huddle at its home planet. No difficulty level was available, but adjustments can be effected by altering the various factors in the configuration screen.

The game deserves a guarded recommendation. Its graphics are primitive, its interface only slightly less so. The rules are long, but the tutorial was too short, making learning a trial and error process. Players with little patience may well pitch this one before they discover its possibilities. For those who do not mind its presentation or the abstract nature of the game, **Worlds At War** should provide many hours of pleasure. SP

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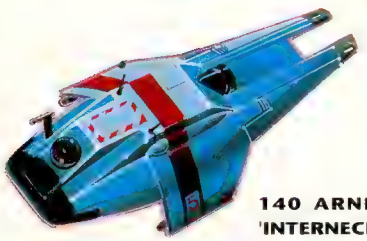

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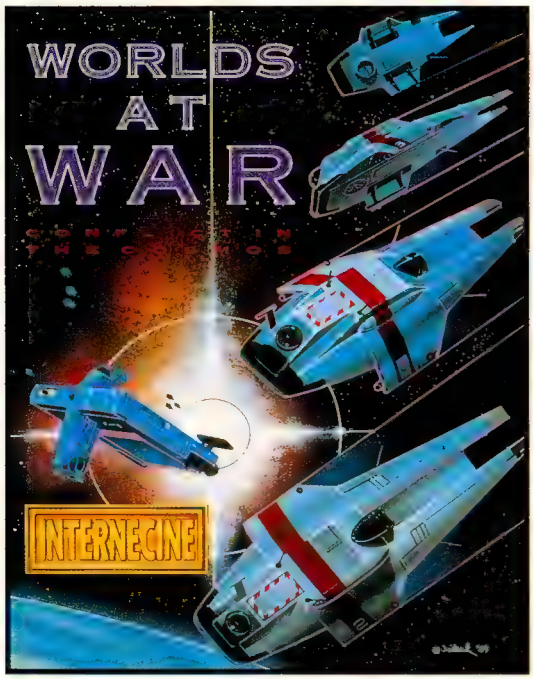

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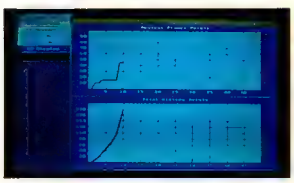

Victory screen showing neutral planets taken by both sides and total victory points for both sides

"Worlds at War" is a game of real strategy for one or two players. It's a game of naval & amphibious combat, on a galactic scale. Simple in concept, 'Worlds at War' can be played in an hour as a small, tactical study with the flavour of a chess game; or for a weekend, as a campaign game with vast regions of territory to explore, huge fleets to manoeuvre, and neutral planets to conquer

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GERMANY TURNS EAST

Strategy in SSI's Second Front: part two

The Russian Viewpoint

by Hern The Hunter

THE GERMANS and their allies begin with all the advantages. Combat experience is in the 90s and higher (apart from the non German Axis units attached to Army Group South), while all units begin with their readiness levels at maximum. On top of this there is a six week blitzkrieg bonus which enables all Axis units in supply to recover faster than normal. The Russian combat and readiness levels are both set at 30. By the time the first week of October arrives most of the Russian units will be lucky to have a combat experience of 50, while readiness will only just begin to show an improvement. For the first six weeks Russian readiness recovery seems to be suppressed at a maximum level of 30. The only advantage the Russian will have by the first week of October is the ability to recover a little better than the frostbitten Axis forces in the harsh winter of 1941. By December the Russians will be looking good and the Axis forces will be looking a little sick.

Jack In A Boot

However a large slice of the Motherland will be under the jackboot. There is nothing that can be done about week one. Riga will fall. If you are playing someone like me you will also lose Baltic and Southwest Front HQs along with the aircraft attached. Fortunately the computer ignores them! In week two, Panzers will have ripped through Minsk and be well on the road to Vitebsk and Mogliev. Like Minsk, Odessa will be overrun by the 40th Pz Korps, having transferred down to the railway line on the Black Sea coast in week one. The first thing to do as the Russian is to consider what the computer does to try to recover the situation on turn one, and then amend the errors!

Leningrad, Moscow and Stalingrad are the three main cities and all three need to be protected and kept out of German hands. All the cities on the map need to be given a garrison on turn one. At least all cities from Stalingrad and west of it should spring up a garrison army at the very start to give them ample time to dig in. However, before looking at the ground defence, let's take what is left of the air armies and decide what we are going to do with the cannon fodder of the skies.

Hun Scanned

You could move the entire mess to a safe haven, like Baku, to allow them to recover and rebuild unmolested. But this is not giving them any combat experience which they need desperately. Some of the stronger dive bomber units along with some fighters could be located in one or two HQs in a central position – somewhere between Vitebsk and Mogilev with withdrawal back towards Bryansk or Orel when the Hun gets too close. However this is just as bad as pulling the units out of danger because the Luftwaffe will visit them every turn causing heavy losses in destroyed and damaged aircraft which will be almost impossible to replace. Worse still will be the heavy losses if you send them on any missions with no end result to show for it. Not one successful mission will be recorded on the main front because the mission is automatically scrubbed if the losses are above a certain threshold! The Luftwaffe will rip your inexperienced airmen into little bits while taking little if any losses themselves.

It seemed to me that the only answer was to find some way of achieving local air superiority, at least for the first four to five weeks, in an area well away from the main front. So Leningrad Front HQ was joined by three new HQ builds south of Lake Ladoga. There are just enough fighters to park six in each HQ with a mix of six bomber and dive bomber units. This leaves a few spare bombers and dive bombers which I parked in yet another new HQ in Kazan (well out of the way). While the Finns picked on Leningrad HQ, the air units in the other three HQs paid a visit to the Finnish HQ with the Leningrad units being used to make the last raid of the week (resulting in fewer mission losses to them). By the time the first German HQ with aircraft attached came within range I was delighted to see the Russian fighters holding their own in the air. No matter what the results are, keep attacking the Finnish HQ each turn with all the aircraft in all four of your HQs. You should also rotate badly damaged units with the resting forces in Kazan.

Russian Shunt

By the middle of September 1941 the Luftwaffe were hitting a couple of these HQs in combination with the Finns. However, the Russian fighters were doing a reasonable amount of damage to the attackers. By mid March 1942 the Russian fighters

Second Front was designed by Gary Grigsby, and is published by SSI/US Gold

It is available for the PC and the Amiga, price £29.99

were not just turning the attackers away, they were able to provide decent escort cover for raids on the Axis HQs which resulted in very heavy losses to ground based German bombers. The Russians controlled the air after June 1942. One thing: resist the temptation to go after the enemy HQs until the first rain turn of 1942 and keep all four Russian HQs adjacent to one another until the weather clears – they will not provide too much in the way of ground support but that is something you will have to forgo until mid 1942.

Back On The Ground

When you come to building defensive lines in the rear areas, you should not waste units. One unit will entrench just as fast as eight! Create the army and then transfer in a single unit. It is strongly recommended that where possible the unit best suited for the task is the independent artillery unit. The Russians have a serious shortage of guns at the beginning. If you consider that the German counterpart has a strength of around 114 to 115 compared to the 4 or 5 strength of the average Russian artillery unit, it gives you some idea of the shortage. AT-guns and independent Tank Regiments are also in the same boat. If you run out of artillery, use them! By keeping them out of the firing line you will be conserving them instead of losing them every five minutes.

Your rifle, NKVD, airborne, cavalry and tank divisions should be used at the front. Then again, if you run out of independent units you can always use divisions that are in the process of rebuilding. Moving them by transfer to armies in the rear areas gets them digging in and at the same time they will receive replacements. Any division that may already be in the army can then be moved forward to yet another rear area army, or a front line army if it is at something like full strength. By doing this the army itself remains in place and entrenchment levels are not affected. Further, the units don't travel too far too soon and become worn out as they would do if they were moved over longer distances – the result of doing that being a massive loss of readiness.

The mech armies available at the start of the game disappear at the beginning of the first Russian combat phase of week one to be replaced by infantry armies. Tank armies may not be built until January 1942. Being left with infantry armies makes things a little bit tougher but at the same time simplifies things. The maximum infantry army total is around 90 but at the start you may not do more than replace those that are lost in combat and add in a few extra new armies each week. In short a gradual buildup is imposed over the first few weeks. It should also be noted that all the mech units attached to the mech armies at the start are removed from the field of combat at the start of week three. The Russians pulled them out in order to retrain and reorganise them!

Ready Steady

The composition of each army is a matter of personal preference. Where possible it is recommended that the front line units build up to a strength of at least six units per army, if not the maximum of eight. Two to three tank divisions with three to four rifle divisions to begin with, building up to three tank and five rifle or eight rifle divisions is my own preference. For rifle include airborne, mountain and NKVD rifle. Cavalry are a little weaker so they should be spread out a bit with no more than two per army.

On turn one it is a good idea to build two or three new HQs on rail lines near to points where you are going to build your defence lines. The full strength units east of the Leningrad, Kursk, Kharkov line should be transferred to these HQs. On arrival most if not all will end up with a readiness of 9 or even less. Putting such units in forward combat units is almost as good as handing them over to the Germans with their hands already up! Leave them in the HQ for at least a week: being on a rail line is almost as good as being in a city as far as readiness recovery is concerned. Never leave a HQ unit in a city; they cannot entrench. On the third week the units in the HQs

I Think... ...Therefore Impressions

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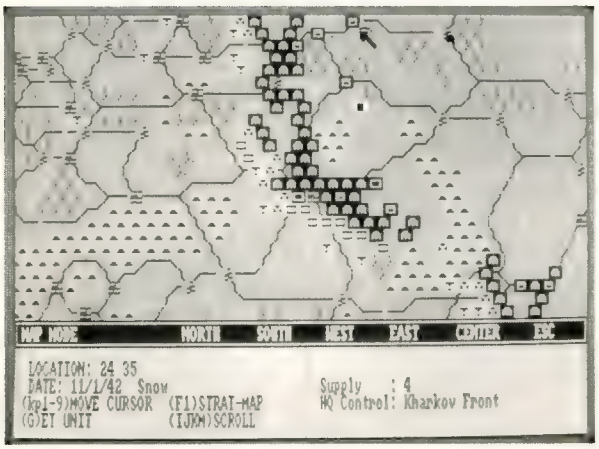
IMPRESSIONS

STRATEGY WITH STYLE

should have recovered enough to send forward to front line units or they can be added to the defensive lines being built near the HQ in question.

In October one or two independent units can be added to an army in exchange for a rifle division which in turn can begin building a new army, in a city when possible. It should be noted that in the spring of 1942 all tank divisions turn into tank or mech corps with one or two additional tank regiments being added in the field.



Leningrad

Although the Finns will not attempt to move on this city until a German unit is actually knocking on the front door in the south, it is a good idea not to give the Finns any encouragement. Just as the computer does, two armies should be placed north of the city to cover the back door with four or so divisions in each. To the south of the city the computer throws up a defensive line to the south/southeast on a line with Moscow – a very strange thing to do! As the enemy advance moves to threaten Pskov and Novgorod some of these units start to move to meet the oncoming Hun and by so doing lose any entrenchment benefit they may have gained. By the last days of September Leningrad will fall into German hands.

Y Fronts

The first line of defence should begin about 20 or 40 miles (one or two hexes), west of Leningrad and run down to link up with the Novgorod garrison on the shores of Lake Ilmen. Another line should begin about halfway up the eastern side of Lake Peipus and run into the Leningrad-Novgorod line forming a 'Y' or you might run this line to a point 20 miles or so south of Novgorod. The 'Y' is intended to save on using too many armies on the line(s) considering that other defensive lines are needed elsewhere. The side door to Leningrad also needs cover. The river from Lake Peipus can be covered by one army. This should be a full strength army made up at the very beginning of week one (an exception to the one unit per army in a rear area!), comprising three tank and five rifle divisions. This will give the force time to dig in and be as fresh and therefore as strong as possible.

By the time the first German units arrive it could well be a match for them because by this time we are hopefully into the first week of October. In order to give it even more of a chance two more armies are placed in the approach hexes on the western side of the river. They are digging in and will be filled at the last minute by retreating units from the screening force falling back in that direction.

The screening force should consist of units thrown together from the survivors of the initial northern assault (not that there will be many), plus reinforcements. In order to stay intact and not give the Panzers in particular free advance after combat moves these units need some strength in numbers if nothing else so that they will retreat rather than fall apart. Leaving sacrificial lambs in the path of the advance will do little more than add a few fatigue points to the attacker and you will lose units you cannot afford to throw away. Again there is an exception: from time to time a spare HQ can be built – on a rail line where possible – anything to hold up the advance of the supply lines! On rare occasions, I throw the mech divisions or cavalry into the jaws of the advancing Germans, but only if there is no other choice.

Pick Pocket

The area that requires cover runs from just north of Riga to Velikiye Luki with the initial set-up being along most of the northern side of the Dvina river at least as far as the rail crossing north of Daugavpils. With some units covering the eastern stretch to Vitebsk. It is doubtful if you will be able to field more than three to five armies along the western part of this line. You should not use any more than this or you may end up with a shortage of armies for building defensive lines. Their job will be to pull back slowly into the Tallinn pocket. At least, that's what I call it. As the Panzers are hell bent on heading for all points east the only threat here should be from infantry. Stand where possible but fall back if in danger of being cut off. Once your troops have been pushed back to the side door defence, including the Tallinn garrison, put the strongest units available into the two armies to the west of the river and send the rest to the armies in the main Leningrad line(s).

Pskov and the rail link to Leningrad is a key target for the Panzers, though initially on arrival it is quite likely that they will be a little short of supplies! Aside from the city garrison another unit should dig in to the north of the city on the railway (in addition to the one further north as part of the 'Y' line). The Germans will attempt to drive up this line to cut the rail link that connects Leningrad to Tallinn. By cutting this line early enough it will create the 'Tallinn Pocket' and five or more Russian Armies will be cut off and easy pickings for the German infantry. The Germans will almost certainly take Pskov, but you must try to prevent them from getting too much further north than Novgorod. You should be able to hold Novgorod. You must also watch for a sneaky try at cutting the Leningrad, Kalinin, Moscow rail link to the north northeast of Demyansk.

Moscow

I estimate that at the very least the computer places half of all the available Russian Armies in front of this city over the first couple of weeks. The Moscow defence covers a rough circle from Kalinin (northwest), to Rzhev (west), to Vyazma (southwest) to Tula (south). This is fine, yet at the same time the way they are set up in 1941 leaves a lot to be desired (it does improve at a later date but by then it might be too late!). There does not seem to be any pattern to the initial defence, just a pile up of units who will end up getting in each other's way, particularly as the Germans begin to squeeze in the outer edges. A unit in the forward line is hit and knocked out of its entrenchments, then because of the pile up of units to the rear it has to hop over three friendly units before it finds an open spot to land in. This retreat of some 80 miles (four hexes), results in the Army commander reporting... 'Sorry Comrade General, but the lads are going to be a bit pooped for the next three weeks!' Worse still, another unit is forced out of its foxholes, but in this case it only has to hop back over a couple of friendly units, but its not that lucky!

As it lands on the second unit it promptly shatters! All the units in the army have had their combat level reduced below 50 and their commander is a twit for not holding them together, or they lost too much readiness. 550 tanks, 1100 squads and 400 guns gone west because it had no room to manoeuvre.

The message here is simple: don't bunch up units without giving them room to fall back as few hexes as possible. It is true that Panzers can and often will attack the same unit more than once, but many units can survive being hit up to five times as long as they are not forced to fall over other friendly troops which seems to add far more fatigue than falling back into an open hex does!

As far as defending Moscow is concerned it is far better to build two to three lines of defence with at least 20 miles separating each line. In order to give them time to dig in, the first line should begin at Mogilev and run north through Velikiye Luki, turning north northwest towards Pskov. Protect Demyansk at the same time not just by putting an army in the city, but by placing a couple of armies along the river line south of Lake Ilmen. The second line should begin at Kalinin down to Rzhev, through Vyazma to Bryansk. The rear area behind the second line should see an army parked on the railway lines connecting Rzhev/Moscow and Vyazma/Moscow, with another located between them – the last ditch line 20 miles or so west of the city which can be added too over the next four to five weeks.

Marsh Mellow

However the central defence begins at Minsk. The force in this city will not be able to hold but at least it can be protected from being enveloped and destroyed by placing an army to the northwest and another to the southeast. With luck these units will survive any attacks, but will be forced to retreat as they don't have the strength or combat experience to stand against Panzers. One unit should try to fall back into the northern edge of the Pripet marshes, while the others fall back towards Vitebsk. By the first week of August (turn three), it is quite likely that at least one if not more Panzer Korps will be at the western outskirts of Mogilev and another will be very close to Vitebsk. The only saving grace here is that the Panzers will have overrun their supply line. They are likely to hit any adjacent units, but will probably hold their ground until a supply link is reestablished. Once that has been accomplished they might well disappear to be replaced by infantry. The Panzers will turn north towards Velikiye Luki.

You might consider hitting back at the out of supply Panzers. Don't: such a folly at this stage will only result in heavy losses, Russian losses! The odds will be zero and several hundred squads, not to mention guns will go by the board for little more than a Panzer or two and perhaps one or two squads, if that. Even out of supply, their combat experience alone will protect them. You might consider a bombardment, but this will also reduce your readiness levels and you are not likely to have enough attached artillery to do more than take out a squad and perhaps a gun or two... is it worth it?

From Velikiye Luki and Vitebsk the main advance on Moscow will begin and it is likely to be more an infantry push, with armour in the north heading for Novgorod and Demyansk. The better part of two month's clear weather will mean a touch and go affair in which you must now hold your ground wherever possible. Once an army is placed in front of the advance try not to move it and it will entrench. The units built along the Rzhev/Vyazma line as the Germans approach Vitebsk and Mogilev will have a little time to dig in, not much but enough to cut down on losses and perhaps even hold the ground for another weeks delay. When an army is forced back, transfer the individual units from that army to others close by that are still dug in and readiness will not drop too much to render them worthless. You should with a little luck hold the Rzhev-Vyazma-Bryansk line and everything to the east. Smolensk can be held! (I lost Vyazma instead.) I even held on to Gomel;

I Think... ...Therefore Impressions

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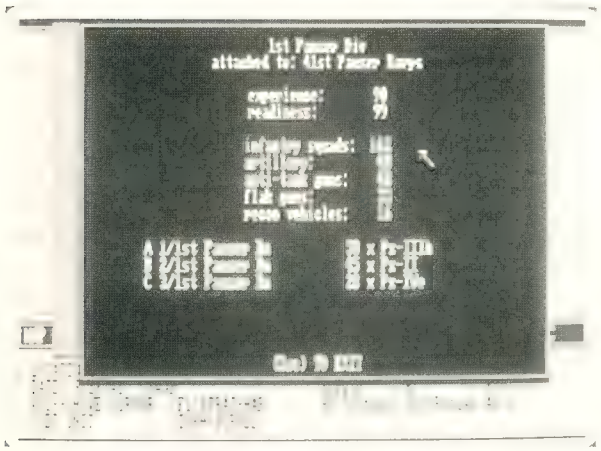
lose that and the road to Kursk is wide open.

Stalingrad

For Stalingrad read Stalingrad/Voronezh. For some reason that I cannot quite understand the computer begins putting defence forces around these cities. There is a covering force that will put up a fight to the west of Kiev and another north and east of Odessa, but once these units have been despatched all the defence in the south is left to the city garrisons until the Germans have isolated Kharkov and begin to put a direct threat on Kursk while advancing on Voronezh. Even Stalino and Rostov are in grave danger of being overwhelmed before any serious reaction is seen between Kharkov and Voronezh. I find this very strange because of the three main advance routes the southern front has the potential to be the strongest and I think the most important. There are more key cities down here for a start. Aside from Stalingrad we have Baku, Groznyy and Saratov: all victory cities, all within the region of the southern advance.



The Dniepr river is the line and it is here that the German advance can be held. The first thing to do is to look at all those Russian units that have not been touched by the Germans in the first week, from Odessa north to the southeast of Lvov. They should be pulled back to form a line along the Yuzhni Bug (east of Odessa), as there is no point in anyone standing up to 40th Panzer Korps Odessa should be abandoned, but a couple of HQs can be placed on sections of the railway west of the city to delay the German advance. You should be able to link up with the Uman garrison, filling the nasty open area between Uman and Zhitomir with two to three armies in the eastern part of the wood due south of the Pripet marshes. Leave the army on the Lvov to Zhitomir rail line as far west as possible and another to the north northeast of it in the marsh. This plus a screen around and in front of Zhitomir and another in front of Kiev should delay the advance long enough for you to begin building the Dnieper river line.

This line should begin where it will hold until the spring of 1942. From the city of Dnepropetrovsk down to Zaporozhe and the 40 miles to the Sea of Azov should be covered by armies digging in from week one. At the same time another army should be parked directly behind Kiev. The actual line will take at least two to three more weeks to build, but you should start filling in the holes between Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk closest to the advancing Germans and from Kiev to Gomel. If you can, units should also appear along the river line from Gomel to Mogilev, ensuring that the Gomel garrison is good and strong and that the flanks are protected.

Pressure from the Germans down in the far south will be light as they will have to spend time pushing back the Zhitomir screening force, take the city (which you should be able to recapture without fighting for it!), retake the city, then deal with the Kiev screen and then take Kiev. Be a pain down here. The unit left in the Pripet may be ignored by the Germans, they will try to knock the army sitting on the railway back instead. Using tactical plot it is possible for the unit in the marsh to nip down, reclaim the railway behind the advancing Germans and nip back into the swamp to the northeast. The Germans will have to recapture this hex in the same way. A delay in getting supplies to the forward elements all helps to hinder the advance. (You may find you can do this elsewhere, if you can do it without throwing away an entire army, do so.)

Break Out

The southern line will break and the Germans will pour out through Kiev, and maybe down from Gomel but at the very worst you should be able to hold on to a line running from Bryansk to Orel down to about 20 to 40 miles west of Kursk and Kharkov onto Dnepropetrovsk and on down to the Sea of Azov. The stiff opposition along this stretch of the line is proven by virtue of the fact that the first 15 or so Guards units appeared in three armies that were defending the immediate vicinity west of Kharkov. 'Stalin is pleased to inform you that 5th Mountain Div became 1st Guards Mountain Div, 3rd Airborne Div became 1st Guards Airborne Div, 13th NKVD Rifle Div became 1st Guards Rifle Div, 199th Rifle Div became 2nd Guards Rifle Div and 6th Artillery became 1st Guards Artillery!' A few well timed counterattacks against the non-German Axis in particular can be executed down in the far south during the last stages of September.

In October I would suggest sitting still, the Axis forces will continue to try to make a few local attacks, in snow: a mistake that you will be able to take advantage of as soon as the first blizzard shows up. As soon as the first blizzard turn arrives, hit everything, especially if it moved or attacked in the previous week. You will find that you can afford to make individual attacks almost everywhere and the Axis forces will rout, but take care not to overdo it as your losses for each attack will almost certainly be higher than the defenders. The Germans will counterattack and go for exposed Russian units that have advanced out on a limb or have become weak due to too many losses.

One last general comment. All HQs should have their RPL pool levels set at 100 (80 at the very worst!), until November or the beginning of December. Building up a large RPL pool in the rear is all well and good but right now the Russians need these men on the firing line. In December you can afford to reduce some if not all of the forward line HQs RPL intake to 50 or 60. The reduction results in a lack of replacements so combat experience will go up and a few Guards might show up. Pull them out of the line as and when you can and place them in a rear area HQ on rail lines with the RPL level at 100. The Guards will then build up to full strength faster: a strength that is somewhat improved over a unit of the same type. They can then be used as the basis of your first shock army. Note that although a tank division might have an overall combat experience of 81 or more, it is the individual tank regiment in the division that has to gain the 81 experience before becoming a Guard unit. Further tank divisions do not convert to Guards regardless of their experience, while tank and mech corps do convert to Guards. In short you will have to wait for tank and mech Guards until the spring or summer of 1942, sometime after the tank divisions convert to tank or mech corps! The RVGK unit should always have its RPL level set at 100 as all destroyed units turn up here to be rebuilt. SP

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RAILS WEST!

A retrospective, by Mike Woodhouse

ONCE IN a while a game comes along that strikes a particular chord. It doesn't have to be spectacularly well presented, either in looks or user-friendliness. You love it in spite of its shortcomings. **Rails West!** was one such.

Available in the early 1980s for the Apple II, Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit range, this was a massive game (for the time), implemented in several separate programs, each of which loaded from disk as and when required. Bear in mind that all the machines were 8-bits, with a maximum usable memory of 64K, some of which was taken up by such inconsequentials as the operating system and BASIC. It is also a sad truth that the Atari and Commodore vied for the unwanted distinction of having the slowest disk drives in the history of mankind, making the wait for a new menu to be loaded into a form of Chinese water-torture, the memory of which still makes me wince.

Steam Fetish

And yet we loved it, getting up early on Sunday mornings to assemble in time to get the 12-14 hours necessary to play a full game in a day. In one case, two players driving home after a game, trying to analyse what they had and hadn't done wrong, missed their turning and found themselves heading through the Dartford tunnel, having to pay twice in order to get back!

So what was this game among games about? Well, as the name suggests, it was a railway game with the theme of expansion of networks into the Western USA in the age of the great robber barons. The meat of the game was in the financial wheeler-dealing, rather than the building of track, although the calculation of the final result carried large weighting in favour of railroads which linked the East (from around Chicago) to the West Coast. Players invested in existing companies (and could take control if their holdings became large enough) or created new railroads and attempted to take on the competition.

Railroads expanded by chartering and building pre-defined routes, attempting to generate sufficient revenues to cover the interest payments on the massive debts they had to incur to get the track down in the first place.

Major Economics

All too often the economy would take a nose-dive at the critical moment and the company would find its bankers calling in the receivers, its shares suddenly all but worthless (as if anyone would want them) and any unissued bonds being issued at bargain basement prices to clear the overdraft. A company which could survive, though, would find itself generating huge surpluses of cash, which could be used to repay debt or (and far more often) pay outlandishly high dividends tot he grateful shareholders. Not surprisingly, the dividends were far more likely to be paid out when a large majority of the shares were in the hands of one player...

The game's presentation was dry, to say the least. The only graphics were a rather static and uninspiring map. The game play was handled through a set of text menus. Up to eight players could take part, with up to four of those being handled by the computer. We found that four human players worked well, with a couple of computer opponents thrown in for nuisance value. Each player could perform a number of actions in each year, the number being reduced by one for each railroad controlled. At the higher difficulty levels, very few (four or five) actions were permitted. They were never enough, and a lot of agonising planning went on to try to build up capital, and then use that capital to start one's own railroad in an underdeveloped area, hoping to link up and, with luck, merge with other companies as time went on.

So why isn't **Rails West!** still around today, running on PCs, Amigas and the like, with screens full of fancy graphics, no loads from disk and running across modems all over the country? Well, to be honest, it appealed to a very specialised market – the punters who enjoyed the idea of a strategy game with a heavy duty financial element. The railway theme didn't hurt, but it was never really more than a vehicle for a game which emphasised profit-making through manipulation of stocks and bonds. In many ways it was a game ahead of its time. Also, a printer was almost essential, allowing a player to examine company statistics while someone else was entering their actions. Seven or eight years ago, printers in the home computer market were a rare and precious commodity.

On today's micros, many of **Rails West**'s shortcomings would be eliminated: particularly the multi-loading caused by lack of memory. Perhaps with a larger audience for computer games in general, and strategy games in particular, **Rails West!** would find a greater following. Perhaps it still will. SP

Rails West! was designed by Martin Campion, and published by SSI

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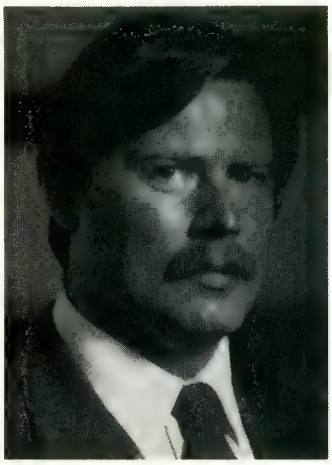
Sierra to join forces with Brøderbund

Sierra On-Line, publisher of **King's Quest** and **Space Quest**, and Brøderbund Software, whose products include the **Ancient Art of War** series, have signed a letter of intent to merge.

The transaction, however, is subject to approval by both companies' shareholders. Brøderbund would become a wholly owned subsidiary of Sierra if the merger went ahead; the consolidated company would be renamed Sierra-Brøderbund Inc.

Sierra's president and chairman, Ken Williams, would become chairman and president of the consolidated company. Doug Carlston, Brøderbund's chairman, would be president of Brøderbund based in San Rafael. Ed Auer, Brøderbund's president, would be appointed president of a new operating unit responsible for Sierra-Brøderbund's manufacturing and sales.



Williams: stronger company.

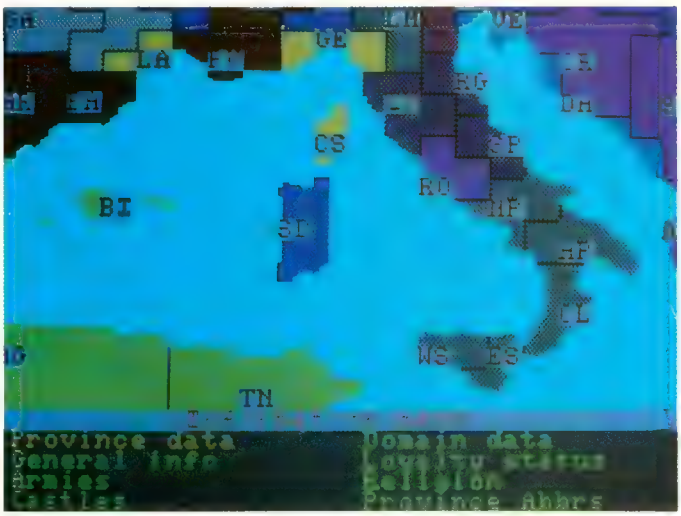
The company's corporate headquarters would be in Oakhurst, California, and Sierra's board of directors would be expanded to include Brøderbund board members.

Williams said: 'Most employees and the customers of our respective companies should not see any substantial change, beyond what we hope will be a financially stronger company with improved product quality.

'This is a merger of equals in that, post-consolidation, Brøderbund and Sierra will exist as sister companies sharing a common distribution mechanism. I will, in effect, be managing a holding company with Sierra, Brøderbund, Dynamix and the distribution company as subsidiaries,' he added.

'This combination will result in a company that has the financial and technological resources to compete effectively on a global basis.'

Carlston said: 'There is no significant overlap in our two companies' product lines, yet we should enjoy substantial synergies in our publishing efforts, primarily through technology sharing and marketing efficiencies.'



Putting the boot in: Medieval Lords.

Shake your flunky stuff

Medieval Lords is the latest strategy game from SSI, and is set in the unpredictable world of ancient Europe and EGA.

The player assumes the role of the king's flunky in the years 1028 AD to 1530 AD.

Taking in such everyday concerns such as Black Plague, Mongol invasions and general cleanliness, **Medieval Lords** emphasises diplomacy, politics, and regular bathing as much as it emphasises hitting one another with sticks.

The game can accommodate one to 10 human and sub-human players, or zero to six computer-controlled 'characters'.

Available on the PC, **Medieval Lords** will be reviewed by a bona fide sub-human next issue.

Modish modems

CompuServe Information Service has brought in an opponent-finding service for gamers who use modems.

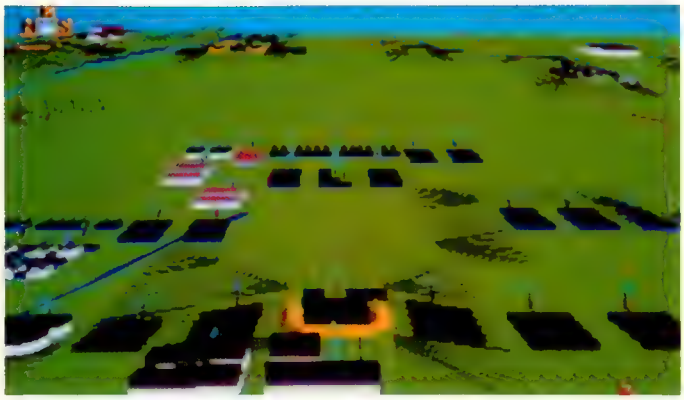
The Modem-to-Modem Gaming Lobby is a place for gamers to gather, find opponents, set up matches, and play modem-capable games on line. Instructions on how to connect with opponents and play most popular modem-capable games through this service are available for downloading free to CompuServe members.

CompuServe's MTM Challenge Board has also been updated for users' convenience. It offers modem gamers the opportunity to post challenges and find willing opponents for most popular game titles.

The MTM Gaming Lobby is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

CompuServe's Modem Games Forum contains a number of shareware and public domain games that can be played with opponents through the service.

To find out how to join CompuServe, telephone 0800 289 458.



A close 'scape

Gettysburg (above) is the latest subject in Dr Peter Turcan's unique BattleScape series.

In this massive American Civil War battle, 70 000 Confederates under General Lee were defeated by 90 000 yankees.

Like its predecessors, **Waterloo** and **Borodino, Gettysburg** features 3-D graphics and many famous people and locations.

Amigas and ST versions of the game are enhanced with sampled sound.

Palace adventure

Palace Software is to release a series of adventure games based on its new Pure Fiction system.

According to Palace, its Pure Fiction games 'simulate an entire game world in which the player has complete freedom to explore.

'The whole game world is maintained continuously, so even when the player is in one place, other character interaction will be taking place in another.'

Demoniak, the first game in the series, was written by Alan Grant, author of the *Judge Dredd* and *Batman* comic books.

The eponymous villain is bent on conquest and gratuitous violence. He also has a taste for the blood of young virgins. Blimey!

Over populated

What do **Sim City** and **Populous** have in common? Answer: from April 10 they will appear in the same box!

This miracle of modern engineering is brought to you courtesy of French company Infogrames (bonjour!).

Both games received record applause on the clapometers so favoured by lesser magazines than *Strategy Plus*.

And the price for this, the best news since Sacha Distel announced he was thinking of giving up singing? An *encroyable* £34.99 on *le* PC, and *seulement* £29.99 on the ST and Amiga. *Allez!*

Activision inactive

Software house Activision has been closed down by major shareholder The Disc Company. The operation will now be run from The Disc Company's Paris HQ, though the Activision name will be retained.

Products in development, such as **Deuteros**, will be released on completion. The Disc Company says that it will now only release 'four or five' titles a year on the Activision label, and only for the IBM PC, Amiga, and something called the 'Nintendo'.

Sierra settles in

Following the recent opening of Sierra On-line offices in this country, the company has unveiled a new Bulletin Board service and 24-hour hint line service.

'We promised our customers when we opened Sierra in the UK the same quality service which put Sierra USA into prominence. I am extremely glad that within four months of opening our new offices the promise has been fulfilled,' said Sierra International business director Srini Vasan.

Meanwhile Sierra's plans for a multimedia hardware package to be released in June this year have had to be shelved. Lack of clear standards, and risk of plunging into what is still an embroynic market were cited as the reasons for this decision.

• '.5 Meg version of **Wonderland** after all,' Virgin's terse press release informs us.

The .5 meg Amiga version still runs under the windowing system but features only the text and graphics windows.

Create a 3-D scene

Tired of stumbling around in other peoples adventures? Then check out Incentive's **3D Construction Kit,** published by Domark, which will enable you to go some way towards creating your own.

In addition to helping the user create his own Legoland, this new toolkit comes with on-board sound effects and will also accept samples.

The program is underpinned by a language that is a close relative of BASIC, but which is said to be easier to use.

3D Construction Kit for the PC comes in 256 VGA with a choice of colours from a palette of some 256 000.

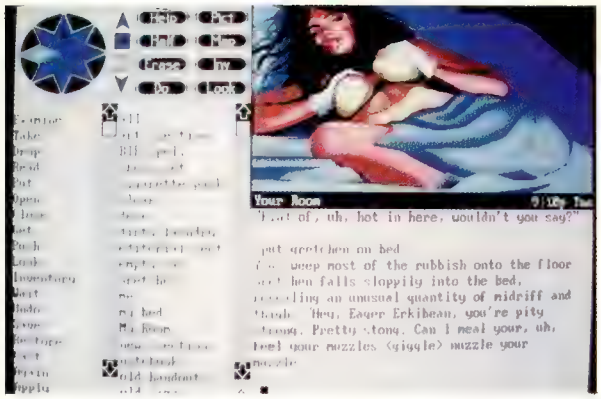
The retail price of this and the Amiga version is a (highly) recommended £49.99, while the ST version comes in at £39.99.

Do-it-yourself scenery: Incentive's 3D Construction Kit.

SPELLCASTING 101

Sorcerers Get All The Girls

by Theo Clarke



SEX SELLS. Package any product with a dash of sexual innuendo and sales will improve. Risque adventure games have been around for more than a decade. Most were written by amateurs for laughs. Sierra sold one. So did Infocom. The Infocom adventure was **Leather Goddesses of Phobos**, written by Steve Meretzky, who also wrote Infocom's **The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy** with Douglas Adams. His games are inventive, witty and unusual. Now he is back and with sex, once more, on the brain.

Naughty But Nice

Spellcasting 101 follows the adventures of Ernie Eaglebeak, a freshman at Sorcerer University. The game is American and the university is one of those *Animal House* style institutions. Ernie attends a few lectures, goes to parties and meets girls. What he does with the girls largely depends upon the play mode chosen by the player. In *nice* mode the Professor's wife asks Ernie to wash the dishes after a meal; in *naughty* mode the dishes get smashed in the throes of passion. None of the sexual material is necessary to the solution of the puzzle, but it is hard to imagine anyone who wishes to use the *nice* mode wanting to buy this game.

Ernie's studies are cut short by the theft of a mysterious piece of equipment known as 'The Appliance'. The university and its inhabitants are nearly destroyed in the accompanying raid, so Ernie must travel around the mythical world of Peloria trying to find the missing components in time to save the world.

Meretzky is notorious for his love of puns and the tricks that he plays on his players. In **Spellcasting 101** the wild gags are scattered so liberally, and the puzzles are so ingenious, that it seems as if the man has spent the two years since **Planetfall** pouring all of his creativity into this game.

The inevitable maze is walled with maize. Ernie visits a foot-shaped island only to find that the inhabitants of this Island of Lost Soles omitted to pay a cobbler and, as a consequence, have lost their *souls*. In addition, eighty islanders have been turned into objects that are puns on their names. Probably of more interest to readers is Ernie's visit to The Island of Horny Women, whose population consists solely of steamy Amazons. Unless Ernie makes a quick escape from this paradise he will die from, to use a euphemism, 'exhaustion'.

The adventure itself is challenging without being overwhelming. The solution is likely to take between 69 and 100 hours to complete. The user interface is not that of a standard text adventure, however. The search for the non-typing interface continues. In this case the screen is divided into five boxes, looking rather like windows but lacking the flexibility. There is a compass rose which highlights the possible exits from any location. Use the mouse to click on a highlighted exit and Ernie moves in that direction. There is a graphics box which displays a map or an animated illustration of the current location. Using the mouse to click on parts of these maps or illustrations can move Ernie or give information about the chosen object. There is a text window that provides information in the standard text adventure format, even down to the prompt. It is quite practical to run the game as a normal typed adventure, but there is the fifth box which contains menus of available verbs, prepositions and objects. The menus change dynamically as commands are built. This should eliminate parser errors but there are still some small glitches and it soon became apparent that it is often quicker to type the commands rather than scroll through long menus.

The first four hours of the review game were played entirely with the mouse and menus. Had the review been written at that point it would have been far less favourable than the final version. Using a mixture of keyboard and mouse skills yielded an acceptable compromise, however. It must be said that there are clear advantages to having a full list of available verbs for consultation. The parser is robust and sophisticated, despite such curiosities as an inability to handle multiple subjects for 'examine'. The graphics are incidental to the game solution but they are interesting and well executed. Studying the local maps can provide useful clues about unvisited locations while the pictures of lightly clad women may be of particular interest to younger male players *(and older ones – Ed)*. Many of the illustrations include simple but effective animation – a flickering fire, running water and such.

Offensive Weapon

Ernie's adventures are fun and Meretzky's bawdy wit is appealing, but this kind of satirisation of sexism is undermined by the titillating illustrations. The erotic humour of the text is not enhanced by the pictures and, unlike **The Leather Goddesses of Phobos**, there is no option to play a female character, though in fairness to Meretzky it should be pointed out that he subsequently claimed he would have liked to have done so, but that the addition of another lead character would have used up too much memory. Meretzky recommends that people likely to be offended by the tone of the game should buy it and throw it away as form of protest. Instead, perhaps people who might be offended by some of the illustrations in the game can buy it and play it with the graphics window set to the map display. Or, they can throw away their concerns about the ethics of sexism and enjoy a racy romp through a computerised campus caper movie. SP

Designed by
Steve Meretzky

Published by
Legend/Microprose

Price £34.99

Available for the PC

CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA and Hercules

AdLib and Roland sound support

BAT

Bureau Of Astral Troubleshooters

by John Scott

IT IS more than somewhat after lunchtime and I am standing in the Station on Terrapolis. It is not much to look at, but a guy must work to earn his crust in this city. The bureau says I must come here to find Merigo. Now this Merigo is not such a guy as one will wish to meet on a dark night, or even a gloomy lunchtime, being a very notorious character indeed. Such a person is likely to prove very injurious to the health of decent citizens in his immediate vicinity. It seems that Merigo and a brainy guy called Vrangor have bid a fond farewell to an institution where they were sent to atone for many and various misdeeds against one and all. Now Vrangor sees the landscape without looking through bars. He is impressed by Terrapolis more than somewhat, and tries to persuade the citizens that he will be much obliged if they will draw up a deed of ownership of the city in the name of his own good self. This idea does not appeal to them in the very least; many citizens are saying harsh things about Vrangor, and about Merigo too. But Vrangor wants to show that he is a big hearted guy and he gives them ten days to think about his proposition very deeply indeed, and to help them to think even deeper, he proposes that if they do not think deep enough he will proceed to blow the planet out of the Galaxy...

BAT (Bureau of Astral Troubleshooters) is a role-playing adventure with a number of features intended to set it ahead of the field. There is a character generation routine which is quick and simple, but sufficient and effective. The player is given 78 points which can be distributed over six characteristics (strength, IQ and so on). A graph then shows how this selection affects 14 varied aptitudes such as lock-picking and chatter. It then only remains to choose a weapon. This will be given to you, together with some other things (like cash) by a shady character in the Gents at Terrapolis Station.

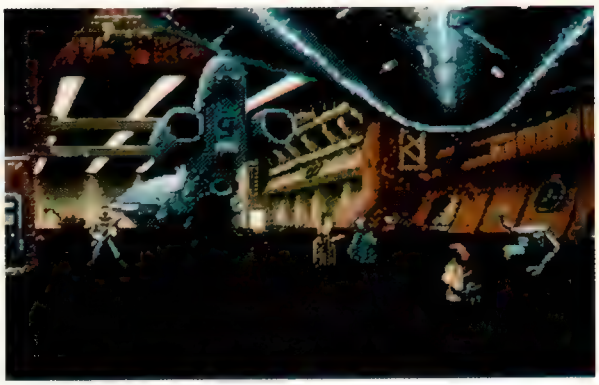
The game is totally mouse driven, similar in feel to Sierra's **Manhunter San Francisco**. As the mouse pointer moves over the screen it changes shape, indicating various possible options. Each area visited is beautifully presented on the screen, usually with a certain amount of animation. As several such pictures may be on the screen at once, at times the game looks a bit like a moving comic strip, and it would be hard to fault this aspect of the game.

Since all BAT agents come equipped with a computer built into their arm, learning to program it is quite essential. Fortunately this is not too difficult. Within a few minutes I was able to enter a program which sounded an alarm if I needed food, drink or sleep, and which automatically translated the speech of whatever species I encountered. Programs can be saved to disk (they are not transferred in an ordinary game save).

Nightclub Vamp

The game also involves a number of arcade sequences, but thankfully these are of the easy-to-master variety. One of these sequences is described as a 'Genuine Flight Simulator', but since it has a total of five controls (up-down-left-right-fire) this is a bit of an overstatement. Also overstated in the publisher's blurb is the extent to which it is possible to interact with other characters in the game. Their responses are very limited indeed, to such an extent that the carefully crafted atmosphere of the game begins to crumble quite quickly. For example, at an early stage in the game the BAT agent learns that a certain nightclub lady knows nearly everyone in Terrapolis. I quickly located her, impressed her with my incredible moves on the dance floor *(I can confirm this – Ed)* and accepted that we should stick together. I then expected to be able to ask her some deep and meaningful questions, but she seemed to have disappeared!

I wandered off, wondering where I had gone wrong. Passing strangers still told me that I should look her up. Then she started appearing on the screen from time to time demanding food and drink. It turned out that she was with me all the time, and was later useful in opening certain doors, but that it was impossible to communicate with her. I later discovered that while it is theoretically possible to talk to any passing stranger in the game it is not possible to communicate with your own party of individuals!



Combat is quick and easy. A brief countdown allows time to choose your weapon and shields (or run away), then it's aim and fire as fast as you can. I was a peaceful dude at first, but I later got so tired of having my pockets picked by every passing stranger that in secluded areas (no cops) I started blowing them away to try to get my cash back. This was probably a bad strategy as I suspect that this game keeps a hidden record on the character of the BAT agent, a bit like the 'alignment' of some role-playing games.

One major flaw in my copy of **BAT** was its tendency to crash occasionally. This always happened during certain arcade sequences if I had to attempt the sequence more than once, and on other occasions the screen just blanked out for no apparent reason.

Perhaps more serious from the gaming point of view was the communication problem with characters and consequent failure to suspend disbelief. **BAT** is the type of program that I always find most infuriating – the kind that could have lived up to the hype and been a solid gold classic *if only* a bit more work and variety lay behind the glossy sound and graphics.

The game boasts over 1100 different locations to visit, but unless you are a total addict for this kind of thing I'd bet 50 Creds that frustration will grind you down before you've seen a quarter of them. SP

Published by Ubisoft

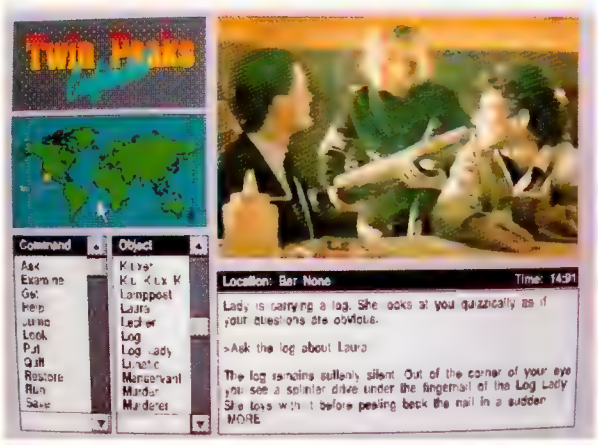
Price £24.99

Available for ST and Amiga
Reviewed on the Amiga

TWIN PEAKS CONFIDENTIAL

Trapped In The Subungual

by Marcus L Rowland


Twin Peaks
Command
Object
Location: Bar None
Time: 14:91
Lady is carrying a log. She looks at you quizzically as if your questions are obvious.
>Ask the log about Laura
The log remains stilenly silent. Out of the corner of your eye you see a splinter drive under the fingernail of the Log Lady. She toss with it before peeling back the nail in a sudden
MORE

TWIN PEAKS Confidential (**TPC** for short) is described as a 'Multimedia adventure experience'. That means a slightly surreal graphics adventure game with a hypertext interface. Before talking about the game itself, I have to describe system requirements: they are unusual, and you may even need a new computer before you buy the game!

TPC comes on three disks, but one of them is a CD-ROM which appears to hold about 500 Mb of data, sound, and video, the others 1.2 and 1.44 Mb floppies holding the program that decrypts and loads the main game. It runs under Windows 3 in 386 mode, so you'll need a 386 or 486-based AT with a CD drive, Windows 3 (a runtime version isn't included), and at least 2.5 Mb of memory.

At current prices that's around £1200 worth of computer, plus £500 or so for a CD drive. You'll also need about 10 Mb of free hard disk space for **TPC** temporary files, over and above the requirements of Windows 3, and 428K per saved game. The graphics include digitised video sequences, which load in monochrome under VGA and Super VGA, and full colour with 8514/A graphics. Take the final hardware price well over £2200 to add 8514/A graphics. A driver for the Hercules Graphics Workstation card (about the same price as 8514/A) will be available in 'late 1991'.

Still Waters Run Deep

Stills, such as maps and pictures of each person you encounter, do load in colour on VGA, and generally look a little garish because of the restricted palette. Loading speed is greatly improved with a maths co-processor or 486 chip, so it's obvious that a lot of number crunching is taking place. Naturally all sound is recorded on the disk, so for once you don't need a sound card to get the best results. There is no other provision for sound, so if you own a really early CD drive without sound circuitry you may run into problems.

Given the hardware, installation of the game itself is easy; just copy one of the floppies to a hard disk, then load Windows 3 and add **TPC** to the games folder. The icon is a picture of a cherry pie and a mug of coffee; two alternatives are provided, pictures of Laura Palmer or the Twin Peaks town sign.

Lynch Mob

TPC is heavily copy protected, using a key disk and a key word. The key disk is the floppy, the key word comes from the pages of 'Laura Palmer's Diary', a banal narrative (not the recently-published novel) which provides a few clues and takes up seventy of the ninety-six pages in the game manual. Since the CD-ROM is encrypted this protection may seem strange, but the reason is simple: you can have multiple users on Novell and other common network systems. Each must have a different key disk (the two provided with the game both apparently have the same embedded code number); you can get additional site licences, manuals, and key disks for $49.99 per user. No UK price is available at the time of writing. At first I thought that this was a silly idea, then I realised that most of the machines currently capable of running **TPC** must be file servers. I wasn't able to try several users, but I did try loading it through a network; it ran painfully slowly, with a delay of fifteen to twenty seconds before each video excerpt, and the sound still came from the CD drive in another room!

After all this the game needs to be extremely good, and in a lot of ways the programmers do seem to have got it right. The objective is to solve Laura Palmer's murder, and you can take on any one of four roles: Sheriff Trueman, Special Agent Cooper, Laura Palmer's ghost (suffering from amnesia), or the Log Lady. All have their strengths and weaknesses: for example, the Sheriff is strong and moves quickly, and knows a lot about the town, but what he thinks he knows isn't necessarily accurate. Some people won't tell him the truth, others won't talk to him at all. Agent Cooper knows very little about the town or its citizens, but is familiar with the murderer's methods and has an uncanny ability to spot lies and barely perceptible details.

Quick And The Dead

The female protagonists are very different; Laura's ghost can go anywhere and see and hear anything, and can even walk through walls, but she can't usually talk to witnesses or influence events, and doesn't remember anything apart from vague biographical details. The Log Lady is slow, and difficult to control, but almost everyone she meets reveals something or triggers a train of thought in her rather peculiar brain;

Designed by
Lario Lopf /Shigatsu No Baka Technology

Published by
Log Lady Games Inc

Price £69.99

Available for the PC, Macintosh, NeXT, and Commodore CD-TV versions in preparation

See the text for technical

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whether or not the information is relevant is another matter. Think of her as a schizophrenic Miss Marple.

The game interface is good graphically, but poor in some other areas. Travel is one aspect that seems to work well. Short range movement is under mouse control; the effect is rather like moving through the art gallery on the BBC Domesday system. For longer journeys you use a small map window which always shows your current location; if you click on it the map expands to fill the screen, and you click on your destination to travel there by the most appropriate means. The map can also be zoomed in and out; three clicks gave me the entire state, all of North America, and the whole world.

It's possible to travel anywhere in North America, but you waste time and don't seem to gain anything. When I tried travelling to London the game quite happily let me, but the plane was apparently hijacked by Swedish terrorists and crashed in mid-Atlantic. For some strange reason that wasn't shown on screen.

Dances With Owls

For local journeys the Sheriff and Agent Cooper generally use cars, Laura just drifts ethereally, occasionally walking through trees and walls, and the Log Lady seems to meander fairly erratically. This is annoying if you are trying to get somewhere fast, but her random movements occasionally reveal extremely strange events. For example, she once 'accidentally' walked through something that looked like a fight between black bikers and the Ku Klux Klan, without getting hurt or stopping to ask anyone what was happening.

Laura's ghost also seems to end up in odd locations occasionally; one unexpected encounter was set within the soap opera that's sometimes seen on TV in the background of *Twin Peaks*. I won't say who was watching, because this seems to be one of the few points at which Laura can communicate, and she gets some fairly vital information by taking on the persona of one of the TV characters.

The other characters can talk to anyone they meet, by selecting one of a menu of phrases. For example, on first meeting the Log Lady Cooper can say 'Hello', 'Nice day', 'Can you tell me about Laura Palmer', or 'Why are you carrying a log?'. Whoever you talk to, answers range from helpfulness to interruptions and downright rudeness. Whatever you 'say', and whatever is said to you, is spoken very clearly; there are evidently sound samples for all major characters on the disk.

Everything said is also echoed to the screen; usually some words are concealed 'buttons' for hypertext information screens or additional dialogue. When the Log Lady says 'My log has something to say to you' there might be concealed buttons on 'log', 'something', and 'you'. Clicking on 'log' has unpredictable results; in five tries it gave me the entire history of the log, a reference to the Captain's Log in *Star Trek*, all the dictionary definitions of log, some vital information about the murder, and the natural logarithm of 2.

Each character has at least one unique ability. For example, the Log Lady can talk to the log (in other words herself) at will, and sometimes gets some very odd answers. Incidentally, the log sounds like Michael Caine; not many people know that.

By the time this review appears the TV series will probably have revealed Laura's murderer. Don't worry, the authors of **TPC** say they have chosen alternative killers, a different one for each detective. Since I haven't completed a game I can't confirm this.

Trancendental

I'm very impressed with the technology of this game, less impressed with the contents. Buyers have to accept the fact that it's a good deal less surreal than the TV series, and doesn't really transcend the limitations of the adventure genre. Every now and then you run into a situation where you want to do something, but the computer won't let you because the programmer didn't think of it.

The plot line and behaviour of characters often deviates from the TV series, but their actions still seem excessively stereotyped. Very few of the audio/video sequences add much to the adventure; they seem to have been included mainly to add atmosphere, and because the technology of CD-ROM allowed it. At present few PCs are equipped to run it at its best. The situation may be very different in six months, especially if Commodore's CD-TV (also to be launched at the start of April) leads to a general reduction in CD drive prices. SP

HINTS AND TIPS

- If you are Laura's Ghost, check your body occasionally. Find a medium or a ouija board if you need information fast.
- Sheriff Trueman should carry CPR equipment and spare shotgun shells. DON'T try to ride a motorbike.
- The Log Lady should never talk to lumberjacks, squirrels, owls, or CB radio.
- Agent Cooper should avoid cinnamon donuts (their spelling, not mine), and look at everyone's fingernails. Don't drive and talk into the tape recorder simultaneously.
- Laura's diary for the twenty-four hours beginning just before midnight on March 31st should be examined very carefully; you may deduce something interesting.

NEXT ISSUE

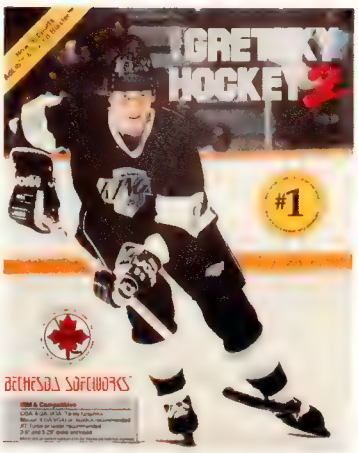
Megatraveller 1

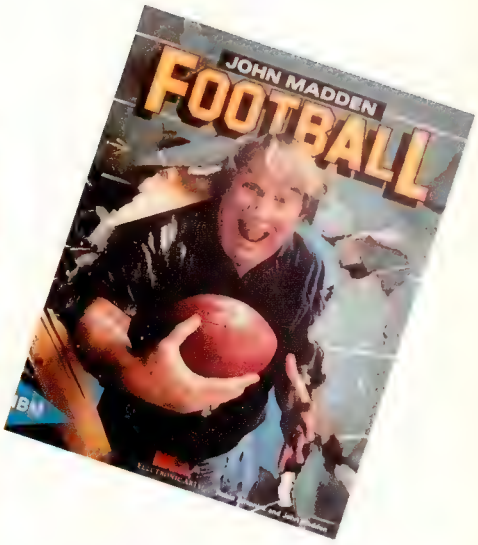
Eye of the Beholder

Death Knights of Krynn

Space Quest IV

The Killing Cloud





Playing the field

Brian Walker runs through the A to Z of sports sims

AMERICA is a nation obsessed by sports. But don't hold the fact that Americans play one of their main sports in pyjamas against them: their software sporting simulations are the finest around.

Baseball

A sport which offers the most consistent quality in gaming terms. Top of the heap is version 1.5 of Electronic Arts' **Earl Weaver Baseball**, a tremendously detailed program backed up by annual stats disks from the major leagues. And the Commissioners disk not only allows drafts and creation of league schedules, but also includes a comprehensive stats editor, an advanced ball park editor that permits stadiums to be customised, an accumulated stats compiler, and even a utility that enables the user to make baseball cards when a printer is hooked up.

Earl Weaver can be played as either a management game or an action game; it can also be played as both. In the combined game the player is provided with a number of strategic options, thus providing the hands on feeling that tends to be absent from stats-based games.

The AI runs off the basic stats – accumulated stats are there merely for flavour. Nits? There is no quick play option, which means league matches can be lengthy. The graphics are EGA, though not too bad. This niggle, however, is about to be corrected with the imminent release of **Earl Weaver 2**, which will feature full VGA and sound support.

Earl Weaver 2 will also feature a player-programmed computer opponent. This is compiled by completing the questionnaire that accompanies the game, allowing the player to determine the playing style of his opponent.

Edging its way into the playoffs is **Micro League Baseball II – The Coach's Challenge** from Micro League Sports. This is a management-only game, again splendidly supported by season disks, franchise history, stadium disks and a newslet-

Micro League Baseball is a well supported and challenging game for coaches. Managers, too, will shortly be put to the test.

Baseball

Micro League Baseball
Designed by Barry Morstain
Published by Micro League Sports
All formats – IBM supports EGA

Earl Weaver Baseball version 1.5 (import)
Designed by Eddie Dombrower
Published by Electronic Arts
Available for IBM – supports EGA and keyboard/mouse

Hardball II
Published by Accolade
IBM and Amiga – IBM version supports EGA, joystick and AdLib

Pursue the Pennant
Published by Pursue the Pennant
Available for the IBM
Order direct from the publisher at PO Box 38364, Greensboro, NC 27438 USA. Tel (919) 299 4388

Pete Rose Baseball
Published by Gamestar
Programmed by Bob Arient
For IBM – supports EGA, keyboard and joystick

ter. Stats are recompiled after each match or can be created from scratch – which is ideal for anyone who wants to start a new league. A print facility is provided that will print out the box score after each game.

The pitches are compounded to speed up play, although this loses the tension generated by one-on-one situations. Unfortunately there is not really enough for the coach to do once the team is on the diamond, but the newly released **Micro League Baseball – The Manager's Challenge** looks set to put that right as it promises 'expanded offensive and defensive options'. A full review of this game will appear shortly.

Anyone who wants a game with the emphasis on action should look no further than Accolade's **Hardball II**. This is an excellent combination of arcade action and stats in the manner of a Cinemaware game.

The best pure stats game on the market has to be **Pursue the Pennant**, a conversion of the popular boardgame. It comes with a stat compiler and various utilities; season disks are available separately. Bottom of the heap has to be **Pete Rose Baseball**. The eponymous star is now in prison on illegal betting charges. This game should be in there with him.

Basketball

EA surprisingly chose to grant a UK release to the esoteric **Jordan vs Bird** instead of **Lakers vs Celts**. Obviously the appeal of the former depends on your familiarity with Larry Bird and Michael Jordan. The game itself is as limited as the title suggests: one-on-one situations. It's well implemented, however, with a good feel for movement plus excellent graphics and stats, but really for fan clubs of the protagonists only.

Lakers versus Celts is a somewhat misleading title in that it actually *understates* what the game is about. Sure, it is possible to play a game between those teams, but there's an awful lot more to do as well. There is a choice of 10 teams, all with real players and accurate stats from the 1988-89 NBA season. These stats never vary, of course. Players, however, have a fatigue level that fluctuates as the game progresses.

The main game is the tournament, which comprises eight (out of 20) randomly selected teams. Games are then played on a knock-out basis to determine the world champions. The play action is the smoothest of all the b-ball games mentioned here, though there are no strategic or coaching options. Another problem is that players on court are identified only by their shirt numbers. As the game is played at quite a speed this means that they have a somewhat anonymous air about them. The side-view, though, is just about perfect.

Omni-Play Basketball: fine handling of league and stats, but let down on court.

TV Sports Basketball is an ideal introduction to the sport: it uses many of the features that were so successful in **TV Sports Football**. It has great graphics and a stats database, though not one based on real players. Editing, however, is possible. One of the best features of the game is the option to create plays whenever a team crosses the halfway line.

College basketball is enormously popular in the US and is well represented by XOR's **Basketball Challenge** – a stats-based game in which the real teams are thinly disguised, though you'd have to know an awful lot about the sport to recognise them. Of all the b-ball games this is far and away the most strategic, and when it comes to esoterica it even leaves **Jordan vs Bird** at the back of the court. Just don't expect Cinemaware graphics.

Omni-Play Basketball, like its horse-racing stablemate, was designed as a modular system. The basic package comes with the SBA League – a complete self-contained franchise that lets the player coach and manage. The league is made up of 24 teams, each named after a major basketball city. These are separated into two conferences (east and west) with each conference having two divisions and each division comprising six teams. The player's names have no basis in reality, though they can be edited. The number of games each season may be scheduled at the player's discretion.

The structure is a combination of cup and league action (to use an English sporting analogy). The objective is to reach the final and play for the Sportime Trophy. The league and stats aspect is extremely well handled, though will not appeal to anyone who is looking for a simulation. Gameplay is enhanced by the use of trading points that can be used to improve your team through training, trading or recruiting from the minor leagues.

Unfortunately, however, the game comes a bit of a cropper where it really counts: on the court itself. Much of this is because of the awkward end-view perspective that shows only one basket. When a team crosses the halfway line, the basket changes colour and the teams appear to change direction. Passing is difficult enough as it is; this simply adds to the confusion.

A coaching only option is available, but this is to avoid playing weak opposition when the result is a cert.

Basketball

Omni Play Basketball
Designed by Ed Ringler
Published by Sportime Omni Play
Available for the IBM and Amiga
IBM version supports keyboard and joystick interfaces

Jordan versus Bird
Designed by Mark Madland and Steve Chin
Published by Electronic Arts
Available for the IBM
EGA graphics, keyboard or joystick interfaces

Lakers vs Celtics (import)
Designed by Robert Weatherby
Published by Electronic Arts
Available for the IBM
IBM Version supports EGA joystick and keyboard interfaces
AdLib Roland MT-32 CMS soundboards

NBA Designed by Ed Daniels
Published by Avalon Hill
Available for the IBM
CGA Graphics and Keyboard or Joystick interface supported

The option to decide plays gives the game the best hands-on feeling of all. The league structure is also excellent. Despite its flaws if I wanted one game on the sport this would be it, with the proviso that the side-view module was included. This honour would probably have been claimed by Avalon Hill's **NBA**, if only that company had bothered to keep abreast of new technology and upgrade the CGA graphics. The game system is excellent and is one of the few programs to include an on-board stat compiler that tracks players' performances as the matches progress. The basic game comes with 20 great teams from 1960 through to 1986.

Boxing

The aptly named **Low Blow** from EA delivered a right kick in the balls to the noble art. Despite the potential of the subject matter (stats, management, action) there have been few genuine champs. The latest contender is Mindscape's **4D Sports Boxing**, an action-oriented game that at times appears to concern itself more with camera angles than the sport itself. The polygon graphics make for boxing blockheads, though one of my creations resembled Chris Eubank – no ifs or butts about it. This customising feature is an attractive aspect. Not only can yer man's physical apparatus be constructed (!), but also his ring attire. The manual's plea to remember that he must have 'dignity' when he enters the ring is likely to be ignored by most designers.

After a few exhibition fights, it's on to the main event. Big Ed Walker gets ready to slug it out with Honeysuckle Rose (that's right, there are girlie boxers!). It soon becomes apparent that the game is nowhere as easy as it appears initially: Big Ed floats like an elephant and stings like a gnat. In the second round he gets put out of his misery as Ms Rose knocks him to a point just north of Mars. The slow-motion replay reveals the truth: Big Ed could not find the towel in time to throw it in. What little stats there are in the game refer to the number of punches thrown each round.

Where the game really scores is the two-player mode. There's no nonsense about modems or null modem links here: it's head-to-head, or rather finger-to-finger, at the keyboard. Graphically, the game is superb – little wonder that there is an option for a third player to take the part of cameraman. Every conceivable angle is possible here.

The lack of realism, however, still gnaws as this could have been beefed up at no expense to gameplay. By a unanimous decision, **4D Sports Boxing** is declared great fun rather than a great sim.

After his enforced retirement from the ring, Big Ed gained employment in the only profession where irreparable brain damage would not prove a hindrance to success: Big Ed became a boxing manager, or to be precise a **World Championship Boxing Manager**. Oddly enough, this also happens to be the title of a game from Krisalis Software.

At first sight this game proves to be quite a surprise for one of British origin – the PC version supports 256-colour VGA and AdLib soundboards. Unfortunately, despite the manual's claims to the contrary, it soon becomes clear that the main strategy involved is remembering to answer the phone (admittedly difficult for Big Ed). The manager has a roster of boxers whom he must groom in the hope that one will become heavyweight champion of the world. Contracts must be negotiated, but as money plays no real part in the game this is largely irrelevant.

Friday night is fight night so it's off to the arena to see how the boys get on. The manager has an opportunity here for some tactical input. Between rounds he can advise his boy on fight strategy. The fight itself is not actually depicted, but consists instead of a running commentary from a Harry Carpenter clone. This is disappointing (Harry) to say the least. The verdicts of the judges have a distinctly random feeling about them, rather like those awful soccer management games. The impression is that no matter what tactics you choose, the result is preordained.

Big Ed Walker, the hardest 'ead-'itter in town, takes to the ring in 4D Sports Boxing.

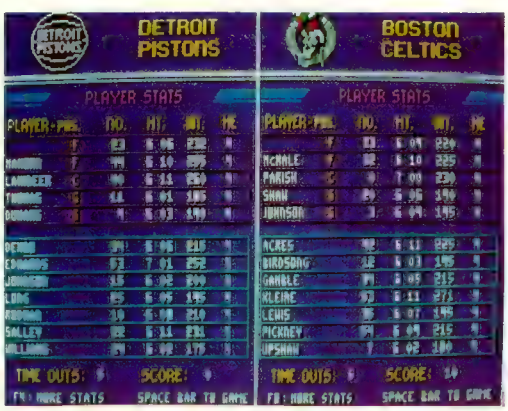
All the fighters in the game are fictional, though the names can be edited to protect the innocent. In the event, the ratings given for each boxer are so superficial that such a task would be useful only as a typing exercise. So much for the 'extensive research within the fight game' that the programmer, Goliath Games, claims to have made. In truth, this is a lazy piece of programming that relies on the gullibility of the player to make up for a genuine cause and effect game system. Needless to say, all the comics cranked up their clapmometers for this one. Cue a British Board of Review enquiry.

Winner of the 'I could have been a contender award' goes to Avalon Hill's **Title Bout**. This is a boardgame of some vintage and one of the greatest boxing games ever. It contains stat cards going all the way back to Jersey Joe Walcott. There was a computer conversion but only on eight bit. The time is now right for a comeback.

Another one from the old days is Accolade's **TKO**. This looks a bit punch drunk compared with **4D Sports Boxing**, but is still worth picking up if spotted in the boondocks, as is SSI's strategy game, **Ringside Seat**.

Cricket

Graham Gooch Cricket is about as effective as the performance of GG and his travelling circus in Australia



Real players and accurate 1988-89 stats feature in Lakers versus Celtics.

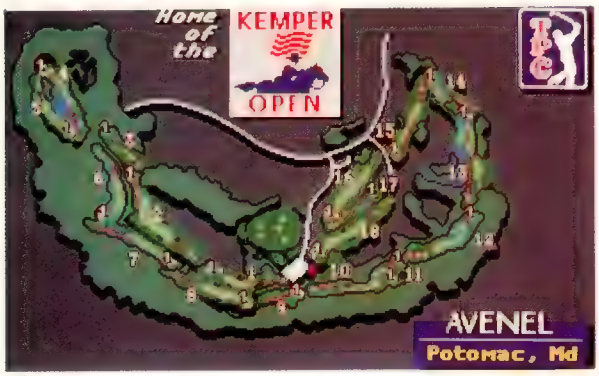
Boxing

Low Blow
Designed by Mark Madland John Conley and Jim McBride
Published by Electronic Arts
Available for the IBM
EGA graphics and joystick interface

4D Sports Boxing
Designed by Distinctive Software
Published by Mindscape
Available for the IBM
IBM version supports keyboard mouse and joystick interfaces, AdLib and Roland soundboards

TKO
Published by Accolade
Available for the IBM
IBM version supports EGA, keyboard and joystick interfaces

World Championship Boxing
Designed by Goliath Games
Published by Krisalis Software
Available on all formats
IBM version supports EGA VGA, mouse and keyboard interface, AdLib soundboard



PGA Tour Golf: top when it comes to gameplay.

last winter. **Cricket Captain** was reviewed in *Strategy Plus* 2. It is not recommended.

American Football

Undoubtedly the best represented sport both in quantity and quality, there's truly something for all tastes here. The Superbowl winner must be Microsearch's **Pro Football Simulator** (Amiga only), which is not the easiest game to get into, but the best. Every team has a roster of 45 players, each of whom has an overall rank and 11 separate abilities. It is these abilities that determine a player's skill in all situations. The 15 teams that come with the game are not NFL teams, though there is a template that enables the user to create new teams. The beginner's playbook provides 18 offensive and nine defensive plays. While the learning curve is still being negotiated it is best to let the computer handle defence while you handle the offence.

Once this has been mastered you can say hallo to the standard playbook. This contains 61 running plays, 50 passing plays and two plays to control the clock. On defence there are 104 plays, taking in blitzes, rushing and double coverage. If all this is not enough, there is a design-your-own feature where the only limit to a play is your imagination. The AI provides a good game, though a *homo sapiens* is preferable (as ever). In addition to head-to-head play, the game can also be played via modem or with a null modem link.

Graphics are quite basic – the players are represented by their numbers within a small box. Within these limits, however, they work well and provide a clear guide to what's going on. Multi-player league play is also possible in addition to the 1-2 player option. Version 3.0 of this excellent game is due out shortly.

Also worthy of note is **John Madden Football** (IBM) from EA. As the title suggests, play design is the essence of this game. A playbook is provided, though the expert coach will want to go straight to the chalkboard. This is the area where you can design your own plays or edit existing ones. Players are moved by the joystick, or they can be put on autopilot if you're a management freak. Ten teams come with the game, each with their own distinctive style. Like most of these 'unofficial' NFL games, both team and player names can be edited. The graphics in EGA are more than serviceable. If there is a criticism of the game it is that it tends to be offence oriented. This can result in some wild scores if defensive plays are not meticulously planned. All in all though, it's an acceptable combination of strategy and action.

If it's Monday night it's **Monday Night Football** (IBM and Amiga), in this instance sponsored courtesy of Data East. The game comes in a box the size of an average linebacker owing to the video tape contained within. This tape contains highlights from the eponymous American TV series, but unfortunately will be of no use to UK users unless they own a multi-format TV monitor. The game itself is a sophisticated relative of **TV Sports Football**, but the playmaker utility gives it the edge. This allows the creation of unlimited plays that can be saved to a floppy disk to form a playbook. In addition to this, the standard playbook offers 30 offensive plays and 12 defensive plays.

Skill levels are worked out in an interesting manner: every offensive and defensive player (except linemen, who are evaluated as a group) will be rated on two skills. The two skills add up to a total of five. Thus if you give your quarterback a rating of four for passing, he'll receive a rating of only one for running. All skills are 'paired' in this way, thus enabling the player to create a team style.

Movement is all player-controlled using the keyboard or a joystick, but you don't need to be an expert 'jock' to succeed. The important thing is to call the right play rather than indulge in fancy joystick wiggling. How the players handle passes and tackles depends on their skill level.

The structure of the game is four divisions, leading to playoffs and then the Superbowl. Half-time intervals feature cheerleaders and even a trivia game based on the Monday night games. All of this adds to the game's general air of exuberance. Graphically this program is in another league to the opposition, and the sound is probably the best ever heard through a PC speaker. The lack of any real stats, or even named players, will probably turn off aficionados, but the action starts here for rookies who are looking for a graphics intensive intro-

Monday Night Football: no stats for aficionados, but plenty of action for rookies after a graphics-intensive game with a one or two player option.

Football

John Madden Football
Designed by Robin Antonick
Published by Electronic Arts
Available for the IBM EGA graphics, joystick mouse, and keyboard interfaces

Micro League Football – The Coach's Challenge
Published by Micro League Sports
Available for the IBM EGA graphics, keyboard interface

duction to the game and one that can accommodate one or two players.

If you *are* looking for a stats game with 'real' players, then look at **Micro League Football** (IBM, Amiga and ST) from our old friend Micro League Sports. Like their baseball game, this package gets more support than Elvira's bosom. Despite the statistical nature of the game, this is one of the easiest of all to get into. It is also the most limited in terms of player input. You simply 'call' a defensive or offensive play and voila! This makes for an fast-moving game (about 30 minutes a match), but also a slightly disappointing one if you are looking for a hands-on game.

One problem is that you never see the defensive call, so you're not quite sure what is working and what isn't. Having said that, the game can be thoroughly recommended for league play and replay gaming. New team disks are available for each year. Considering that it is a stats-based game, the graphics are far better than expected. The plays can be observed clearly, and the figures are cleanly represented within the limits of EGA.

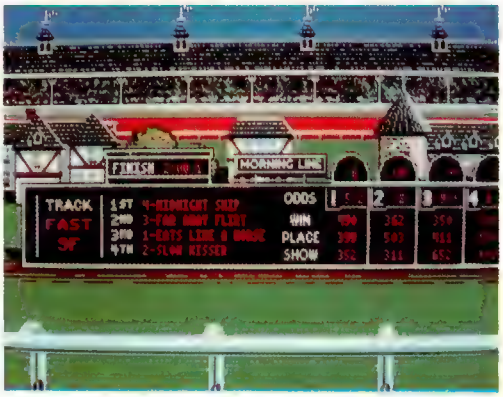
Brøderbund's **Playmaker Football** is available for only the Mac and emphasises customisation and coaching. The program is the most comprehensive in terms of play design. **Playmaker Football** will be reviewed when the IBM version is released in September.

An example of just how this sport has caught on in the UK comes in the shape of **Head Coach v3.0** from UK software publisher Qual Soft. This lets the player take on the gridiron equivalent of *Mission Impossible*: attempting to guide the Schoberg Franklins through to the playoffs. If more games are lost than won, then the next line-up to be faced will be the one at the welfare office. The games take place in the NFL, the Franklins taking the place of one of the real teams. Ideally this should have been optional .

The manual provides a comprehensive biog of each player on the roster. As the season progresses, further information becomes available for analysis in the form of playing statistics. Thus the average yardage gained by the two starting running backs can be compared. A print option also exists to enhance such comparisons. The only way to assess the quality of the opposition is to look at the league standings. The ratings here are compounded and range from 'poor' to 'excellent'.

The actual style of the teams bears little relation to their real life counterparts; in general the teams seem to favour 50% passes and 50% runs on offence, while the defence can best be described as shaky. The playbook consists mostly of standard plays, and the success of each play appears to depend more on the opposing defensive formation than the quality of the participants. Defence consists of choosing a formation from the 20 or so provided. The best part of the game itself is the end-quarter statistics that enable the game plan to be revised. While it lacks the bells and whistles and snazzy graphics of its American counterparts, this is a praiseworthy effort for a small British company and far surpasses the sporting schlock put out by other UK software houses

If grovelling around in the bargain bins is your thing then look out for the following: Avalon Hill's **Super Sunday** – a neat and simple game system, but not a pretty sight in CGA: **Gridiron**, from Bethesda Softworks, represents players as blobs! This element notwithstanding, the game offers a satisfying blend of strategy and action, and even includes a sophisticated playmaking facility.



Modular mastery: Sportime Omni-Play's Horse Racing beats Day At The Races by a whisker.

Golf

Full reviews of **PGA Golf** (PC and Amiga) and **Jack Nicklaus Unlimited Design and Course Builder** (IBM) appeared in *Strategy Plus 1*, while **Links** (IBM) was comprehensively covered in issue 4. The conclusions were as follows: the most accurate simulation is **Links**, but you need a 386/33 for it to run at an acceptable speed. Graphically it leaves the opposition in the clubhouse. **PGA** is tops in terms of gameplay, while JN's course builder offers infinite design possibilities. Don't even think of buying anything on the subject other than these games.

Horse Racing

First past the post is **Horse Racing** from Sportime Omni-Play. It beats **A Day at The Races** by a whisker. **Horse Racing** was designed as a modular system, but unfortunately the company that produced it ran into some difficulty with the result that the planned modules were delayed. The ones that did make it past the starting gate were the Stable Owners Module and the Track 2 Support Module. Just as this article was about to go to press I learned that Sportime is back on course and has just finished two more modules. These are: The Jockey Competition and the Track Designer. Both of these are for the Amiga only at present. IBM versions are planned for late summer. At present the modules can only be ordered from Sportime direct (tel 0101 714 966 0207 Pacific time, Visa and Master-

Golf

PGA Tour Golf
Designed by Lee Actor and Dennis Koble
Published by Electronic Arts
Available for the IBM and Amiga
IBM version supports EGA, all interfaces, and Roland and AdLib soundboards

Jack Nicklaus Unlimited Golf and Course Design
Designed by Ned Martin
Published by Accolade
Available for the IBM and Amiga
IBM version supports EGA and VGA graphics, mouse and keyboard interfaces, CMS AdLib and Roland soundboards

Links
Designed by Vance Cook, Kevin Homer, and Roger Carver
Published by Access and US Gold
Available for the PC VGA only
Supports mouse and keyboard interfaces, AdLib, Real Sound, Speech Adaptor, and MSound soundboards supported
1Mb of RAM and AT recommended

Horse Racing

A Day at the Races
Designed by Piet Francke and Marshall Lake
Published by Team Software
Available for the IBM and ST

Designed by Ed Ringler
Published by Omni Play
Available for the IBM and Amiga
IBM version supports EGA, keyboard and joystick interfaces.

Daily Double Horse Racing
Published by CDS Software
Available for the ST and Amiga

King of the ice rink: Bethesda Software's Wayne Gretzky 2.

card OK). The main program comes with the Handicappers Module and Track 1 installed.

As the names suggests, Handicappers offers a betting game while Stable-owners is more concerned with management. I preferred the latter, but both are recommended. If you are a friend of the turf then you should not be without this game. The objective in Stable-owners is to acquire the most prize money by judicious entry of your nags in a given number of races. Both the number of races a meet and the number of meets in a season are determined by the player. There are umpteen screens provided and from these all decisions can be made, from jockeys' moods to past form as well as post speeds broken down into fifths of a second. Potentially this is a great multi-player game, but because of the number of screens a print option is essential. It is unfortunate that the complexity of such a program put it on hold.

A Day at the Races *does* have a print option, but what you get here is information overkill: there is simply too much to take in. The game simulates the tote betting system in quite an ingenious manner. Players may have a say in how many punters attend the track. The more punters that turn up, the greater the tote. The odds are reduced as bets are placed. The way horses are traded is completely potty, so agreement on this should be reached at the outset. Graphically, **Horse Racing** is markedly superior to its rivals. The info screens are clearer and the rendition of the races is better. There was also a nag called **Daily Double Horse Racing**, but it was put down before it could do any damage.

Ice Hockey

King of the rink is **Wayne Gretzky 2** from Bethesda Softworks. The essence of good sports games is support, and they don't come better supported than this. Bethesda emphasises the fact that this is a simulation as opposed to a game. Certainly every facet of the sport seems to be present here – even the fights, for which there are separate disks. The standard program consists of two teams which can be edited *ad infinitum*. To supplement this there are NHL season disks available, each containing 21 teams, plus an international data disk with ratings for no less than 4 500 players! If this isn't enough, then there is a Team Construction menu which allows entirely new teams to be created, named, and each individual player assigned ratings in 11 categories. The game set-up menu allows just about every permutation imaginable.

Four levels of play are provided to facilitate handicapping – essential if you are a rookie on the rink. Play modes include a coach only option whereby the player sets up 18 lines and decides on the line changes to make throughout the game (lines refer to a particular group of players designed to play together). All such lines may be printed out – essential if the coach only option is selected. For action there is the control player option. At first sight this looks like a joystick junkie's dream, and indeed arcade skills are a help. It must be said though, that the new mouse interface makes control of the players considerably easier.

Even within this normally limited arena, however, the program shows remarkable sophistication: for example, there is a playmaking facility that allows the creation of four defensive and four offensive plays; or there are 16 preset plays available. The player that is under control is the one with the highlighted jersey. Control can be switched to a specific part of the rink at the hit of a key.

Ice hockey is said to be the fastest sport in the world. You'd better believe it after loading **Wayne Gretzky 2** and looking down on the rink for the first time. Even on the slow setting the game looks to be played at a madcap pace and, frankly, is a bit off-putting for the beginner. But the manual is quite correct when it advises: 'Don't be frustrated by the difficulty of play during your first ten minutes.' It recommends using the practice mode to understand exactly how the action game works, advice which I cannot endorse enough.

Wayne Gretzky 2 is a remarkable program by itself, but when combined with the **Hockey League Simulator** it becomes state-of-the-art. This program comes preloaded with players and teams from the

Ice Hockey

Wayne Gretzky Hockey 2 and the Hockey League Simulator(import)
Programmed by Craig Walton and Julian Lefay
Published by Bethesda Softworks
Available for the IBM and Amiga
IBM version supports VGA EGA graphics, mouse, keyboard or joystick interfaces, AdLib and soundboards

1987-88 NHL hockey season and an 80-game schedule. All data disks for **WGH2** can be loaded in to provide up-to-date team and player data as well as providing a ready made league. Most players, I suspect, will want to create a new league and it is here where the program really comes into its own. A league can consist of a maximum of 48 teams, any number of which may be controlled by the computer. The way the league is set-up is entirely up to the player. There is a draft facility where teams actually start with no players (this is excellent if you are planning a rotisserie). Money management can also be an important part of the league structure. If this option is selected each team starts out with an initial budget from which salaries and expenses must be paid. Careful management is essential here for otherwise the players will go on strike causing their ratings to plummet. Financial reports, including player salaries, may be printed out like just about everything else in the program. In the General Manager Menu, players may be traded (even between human and computer controlled teams), coaches may be fired, and new skaters may be picked up on waivers.

OK, so you've set up a league: now how do you run it? First there is the auto play mode. This provides instant results and should appeal to replay gamers. Stats are generated and factored in to form part of the league record. Or, the teams can be imported in **WGH2** and the match played there. The result and the stats will then be fed back into the League Simulator. The program is as complex as one would expect for a product of this sophistication. Considerable file management is required, but the manuals explain everything clearly. There is even an extensive Q&A to reduce any confusion. The combined programs provide one of the best sports simulations currently on the market. This begs the question why, oh why, is there not a soccer simulation of this quality? Perhaps with the World Cup being staged in the US in 1992, an American software house with the same dedication to quality as Bethesda will pick up the ball, so to speak. Certainly the **Hockey League Simulator** provides an ideal role model for anyone planning a soccer game.

Motor Racing

While there has been a glut of driving games, few have tackled the management side of the sport. Despite the instant appeal of the former, this is somewhat surprising because, as recent events have shown, the politics of the sport have a heavy influence over what happens on the track. One game that makes an attempt to capture this is **Grand Prix**, a shareware game from the Scotland-based Wizard Games. The preliminaries are promising: the player must put together a complete team. This means attracting sponsors, selecting a car, and putting together a complete racing team. There is a roster of 50 (real) drivers to select from. The ratings for these are distinctly odd – Senna is rated 17th. His close friend Alain 'The Professor' Prost is way down there too, contravening the dictum that if you are going to have ratings/stats based on real participants then make sure they're accurate. To be fair these figures are based an old version, so it is possible that they have been updated now.

Races are depicted abstractly, which in itself is not a problem. More hard to come to terms with is the lack of a hands on approach to the management side. Once the team and the finances have been set, then there is nothing the player can do during the course of the season to alter them. In fairness the game is meant to be played over several seasons. It's somewhat frustrating, however, to have to sit through entire seasons watching Martin Brundle fail to qualify. Despite these reservations, **Grand Prix** is worth seeking out if you are interested in the sport rather than just the driving aspect. If you *do* just want to put your foot through the boards and mow down a few stewards, then their is no better way to go than our sports game of the year for 1990, **Indy 500**. Vroooooom.

Exuberant air: Monday Night Football.

Soccer

British software houses seem to have taken manager Gordon Lee's advice: 'Flair is something that comes out of the end of a torch.' All of the British games our writers have tried are dreadful. The only sign of promise comes from Ed Ringler of Omni Play fame, who designed **MISL Soccer**, which was based on the American indoor league. No other details are available at present other than it was only programmed for the Amiga and IBM (CGA only), and has an excellent reputation. Imagine, though, having to turn to the Americans to produce a good game on our national sport!

Tennis

There are those who regard tennis as just a load of balls, and there are others who treat it as an excuse to impersonate a mail order catalogue. The latter group are known as tennis pros. The participants in **Pro Tennis Tour** are an anonymous bunch, no doubt because Edberg and company would have wanted six-figure sums for their names to be used. After all, editing is free. Of course the original computer game – **Pong** – was a tennis variant. **Pro Tennis Tour** shows just how far the genre has advanced since then. As a simulation, it's very accurate, which means it's exceedingly difficult. The essence of the game is tournament play, the first of which is the Melbourne Open.

Continued on page 49

Sports Simulated Tennis, from Brøderbund, is due for release this autumn.

Motor Racing

Grand Prix
Designed by Hole in the Wall Software
Published by Wizard Games
Available for the IBM PC
CGA and EGA graphics supported
Price £12 from: Wizard Games, 4 Hoseslow, Kelso, Scotland TD5 8BP

Indy 500
Designed by David Kaemmer and Richard Garcia
Published by Electronic Arts
Available for IBM and Amiga
EGA and VGA graphics, joystick and keyboard interfaces, AdLib and Roland soundboards supported.

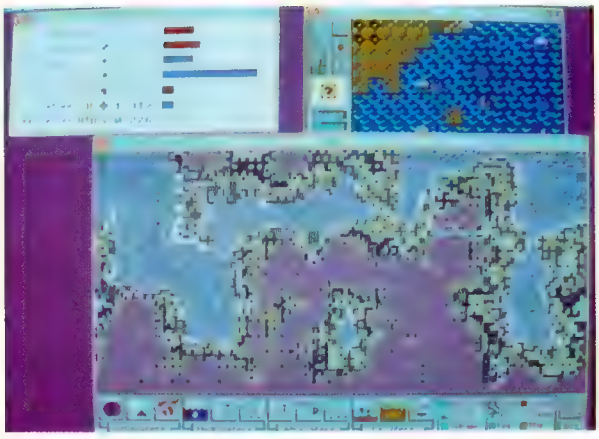
Tennis

Pro Tennis Tour
Designed by Lothar Schmitt Uwe Meier and H Ruttman
Published by UBI soft
Available on all formats

SIM EARTH

I Didn't Planet This Way

by Matthew Stibbe



GENIUS is an African who dreams up snow said Vladimir Nabokov. The 'sim' concept that Maxis has dreamed up is truly original. The concept worked well in **SimCity** where you could see the little 'sims' moving about the city, building tower blocks, and so on. In **SimEarth** the concept is extended to all life on Earth. The difference between the two games is that in **SimEarth** the time scale can be measured in millennia, the scope is planetary, and the game literally divine.

The game simulates the creation and development of a planet as a living whole. A choice of several different scenarios is presented - from a mission to make Mars or Venus habitable to helping 1990s Earth survive into the next century. You can also create your own planet from scratch.

In each scenario, physical and geographical aspects are taken into account, such as plate tectonics, and the greenhouse effect. These conditions affect the environment, represented in the game as a patchwork of biomes, or areas containing a self sufficient environment. These can be jungle, woods, grassland, desert, iceflow or whatever. These biomes are inhabited by a variety of simulated creatures. At first they may be single celled amoebas. As they evolve, you find biomes inhabited by intelligent dinosaurs, or city-building birds.

Tooled Up

Playing with the simulator is easy. There is a vast array of tools available to manipulate the world at hand. Landmasses and oceans can be created. Mountains can be moved, earthquakes and volcanoes erupt, and nuclear explosions produce large crops of vacant land. It is possible to cheat and place life forms and biomes straight onto the planet without letting them evolve from scratch first. I did this to try re-afforesting the Sahara desert – with little success! Throwing meteors at a fledgling civilisation is fun for a while, but mastery of these tools is vital to success. Although the game is a simulator with no fixed way of 'winning', the main aim of the game is to allow sentient life to evolve to the highest level of technology without an ecological disaster. Alternatively, the game can be used to experiment with various solutions to modern ecological problems, or to see if a better job can be made of the palaeozoic epoch, or to try to save the dinosaurs from extinction.

Window Dressing

The program provides feedback on the state of the planet through a large number of windows. The main windows are the map and edit windows. The map shows the whole planet, and lets information like temperature and ocean currents be overlaid. A neat bit of programming on the Mac version displays the map as a globe in a circular window. The edit window is similar to the edit window in **SimCity**. Biomes and life forms on the planet can be placed using this window, and at the same time more detailed information can be obtained about a particular region. There are a large number of other information windows that display graphs of various kinds, and four permits modification of the planetary environment, for example modifying the strength of the greenhouse effect. Again, like **SimCity** the game operates in accelerated real time so the decisions chosen have immediate and visible consequences. Sound is used sparingly, but effectively. There is a tone monitor which gives audible feedback on any one of seven important variables.

So much for the mechanics of the game – the central idea of the game is James Lovelock's Gaia theory. He suggests that the Earth can be thought of as a living entity. At its most basic this theory proposes that the whole planetary environment is in a self-regulating equilibrium. At its most extreme, some proponents of this theory have gone so far as to argue that the Earth actually possesses a kind of consciousness. The game is predicated on these ideas and several of the scenarios specifically allow you to test different experimental models he set forth in his book. The game is fascinating and coherent whether or not you subscribe to this view. For my part, it convinced me that Gaia is a good metaphor.

One 'fun' feature of the game is the Gaia window. It shows planet Earth as a face, with eyes and a mouth. It smiles if you are doing well, and gets angry if you cause pollution or harm the planet. It's eyes follow the mouse round the screen, and if you click in an eye it squeals plaintively. Apart from being cute, this window does give you a good indicator to your progress.

Manual Chore

The manual for **SimEarth** is well written, neatly presented, and informative. As a player, I never read manuals, but as a dutiful reviewer I felt obliged to read this one. It was rewarding. Although the user interface in the game is fairly straightforward, it is important at least to read the tutorial to get an idea of why you should be doing something. The reference section gives an insight into how the simulation actually simulates. The other important part of the manual is the 'introduction to Earth Science' which takes up nearly 50 pages, and covers everything from plate tectonics to DNA. It provides a useful, but non-essential background to the game. It also gives an introduction to the Gaia theory. It is important for a game that aims to educate and challenge to provide documentation that goes beyond the

Continued page 44

Designed by
Will Wright

Published by
Maxis/Ocean

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THE WRIGHT STUFF

Matthew Stibbe talks to Sim Earth designer Will Wright

Matthew Stibbe: If you had to give yourself a job description what would it be?

Will Wright: I guess it would be something like game designer and product strategist. Though I'm considering changing it to llama consultant.

MS: Why Maxis? What is it for?

WW: The name stands for nothing. My partner, Jeff Braun, came up with it. We hope for MAXIS to represent state-of-the-art simulations which have some socially redeeming value.

MS: What will you be doing tomorrow?

WW: Giving a product preview to Stewart Alsop of our next Sim product.

MS: What would you be doing tomorrow if you were not in the computer games business?

WW: Building robots, designing toys or training llamas.

MS: What would you like to be doing tomorrow?

WW: Sitting at home working on my next program.

*MS: Was **SimCity** your first game? If not what was?*

WW: No, my first game was a rather silly shoot-em-up called **Raid on Bungeling Bay**.

MS: Where did you get the idea for SimCity from?

WW: A number of things just sort of crystallised around the same time: a screen editor I had designed to make the screens for **Bungeling Bay**, which I was playing with; my neighbour, Bruce Joffe, who did urban design work for Bectel; a Stanislaw Lem story titled *The Seventh Sally*.

MS: Did you have a design before you started coding, or did the game evolve over time?

WW: It was definitely an evolutionary design. First the road editor, then a primitive traffic simulation. Next zoning, followed by a first attempt at a population model, and so on...

*MS: What do people enjoy most about **SimCity**?*

WW: It seems to me that people most enjoy having an outlet for their creativity. They also tend to feel a sense of ownership or responsibility for the little cities they create.

*MS: What did you most enjoy about making **SimCity**?*

WW: Researching the subject, and also when the model was just starting to run and it suddenly seemed alive to me.

*MS: Did the concept of 'sims' come before or after **SimCity**?*

WW: Long after. The first few years while I was working on it I called it City Planner, and later Micropolis. Michael Bremer, who wrote the manual, had the idea for the name 'SimCity' and the sims that inhabit it.

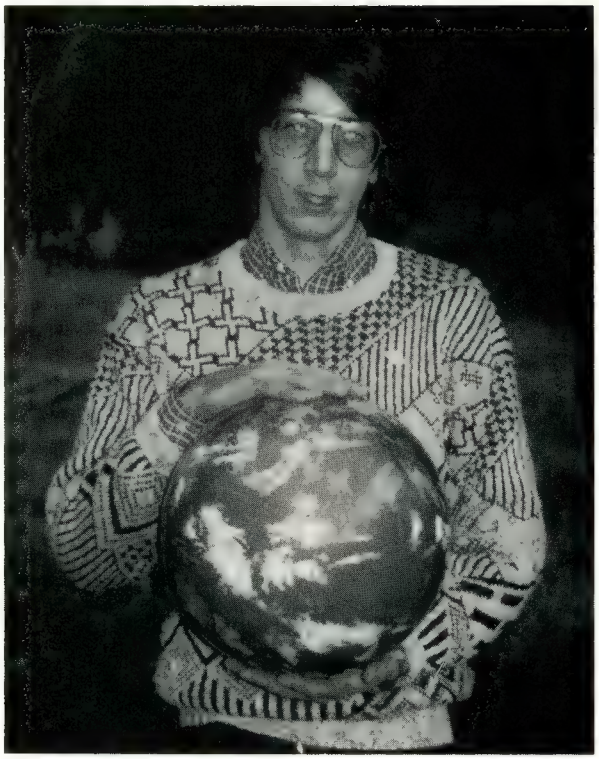
*MS: Did you want to do **SimEarth** before you came across Lovelock?*

WW: Yes, I was working on it for several months before I came across his work.

*MS: How much was the decision to make **SimEarth** a commercial one, and how much was the result of your interest in the subject?*

WW: I would say a combination of both. I wanted to make another simulation which could introduce many people to a new subject. The global system seemed like a good choice. If it only appealed to a few people then it wouldn't have much of an educational impact though.

*MS: Why did you go for a user interface similar to **SimCity** for **SimEarth**? Did you try any others?*



WW: We tried quite a few different interface ideas for both **SimCity** and **SimEarth**. For every line of code in the final products, we probably wrote five lines which were thrown out during the user testing.

*MS: How long did **SimEarth** take to develop?*

WW: About three person-years, mostly divided between Fred Haslam and myself. An additional six to eight months of work went into the manual also.

MS: What proportion was spent designing, modelling, researching, coding, testing and so on?

WW: About 30% research, 20% interface, 30% simulation, 20% testing.

MS: Will there be any more 'sim' products?

WW: Of course. We're working on three right now.

MS: Will you ever do a conventional game, like a flight sim, or a military game?

WW: There are so many people working on 'conventional games' like these. I would much rather work on the oddball ideas that everyone else ignores.

MS: What other games do you enjoy?

WW: I enjoyed **Their Finest Hour** and **Wing Commander**. I also enjoy the boardgame Go, which I consider to be the ultimate game design.

MS: What computer do you develop on primarily?

WW: I do all of my development on the Macintosh.

MS: Do you do your own translations to other formats?

WW: No, we have perhaps two of the best PC programmers in the country doing our IBM conversions, Daniel Goldman and Paul Schmidt. I could never program that machine as well as they do.

MS: What are the problems of working across different formats?

WW: We have to keep the interface routines and the simulation routines separated in the code. We can't depend on any unusual hardware features. And a knowledge of the various compilers on each machine is useful.

*MS: What language(s) did you use to implement **SimEarth**?*

WW: **SimEarth** is about 90% C and the rest assembly code for graphics routines.

MS: Do you think the Mac is going to become an important games machine?

WW: As a games market I don't know. But I think it already is in terms of software design. The Mac has always been on the leading edge of interface design and graphics implementation, both of which are crucial to game design.

MS: As important as the IBM compatible market?

WW: The market will probably never be as big. But if you're designing for multiple formats I think the best results come from designing the first version on the Mac and then porting to other machines rather than vice versa.

MS: What would your ideal games machine consist of (screen size, processor, and so on)?

WW: Maybe a Connection Machine for the processing tied to an Iris workstation for graphics output. On a budget, perhaps a 68040 Mac (very soon I imagine). In the meantime a 68040 colour NeXT would do (If they'd just sell a few).

MS: How many programmers does it take to change a light bulb?

WW: Two. Try typing 'joke' while playing **SimEarth**. SP

Sim Earth, continued from page 42

usual 'press button a to get b.' In this Maxis has excelled itself.

On the negative side there are some technical and theoretical faults with the game. The game only just conforms to the Mac user interface standard. This is particularly noticeable when, for example, the first click in a background window not only brings the window to the foreground, but also does something in the window.

This means that if you have the meteor tool selected in the edit window, go to the map, and then re-select the edit window by clicking in it, not only will the window come forward, but a meteor will land on New York! This is annoying and non-standard.

McGlitch

There are a couple of other glitches like this that apply to the Mac version (the only one I tested). There were also a couple of crashes in the time I played it, although this is probably par for the course. On a more serious note, the game makes some apparently naïve assumptions. For example, it assumes that the only form of development for sentient beings is through an industrial, atomic, and an information age. Fish don't get a look in because they cannot build factories. This kind of restriction on the behaviour of the game is at odds with the game's overall concept.

On one point it is simply wrong. It assumes that nuclear fuel will run out. This ignores the potential of nuclear fission, and of recycling nuclear fuel. The game gives strong environmental reasons why nuclear power should be avoided – it does not need to force the player to avoid it. I suppose that these and other more trivial objections of mine only occur in comparison to the game's strengths.

Despite these niggles, the game is engaging and informative, entertaining. *And* thought provoking. When I tried to figure out why I liked it, I hit upon the awful truth that **SimEarth** is not really a planet simulator, but a god simulator. I remembered the thrill when intelligent life appeared on my first planet (more by chance than design, I might add). I raised a mountain, flattened the top, put in a small lake, and some trees. **SimEarth** – instant Eden. SP

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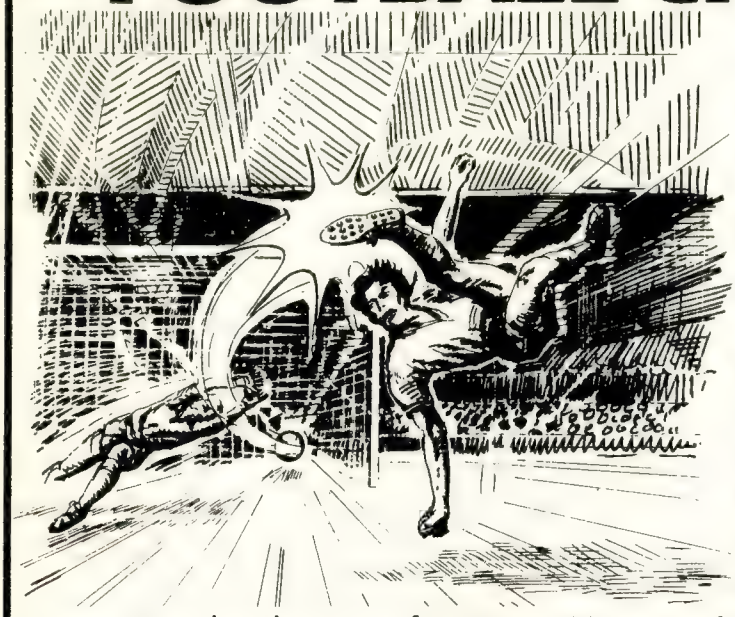

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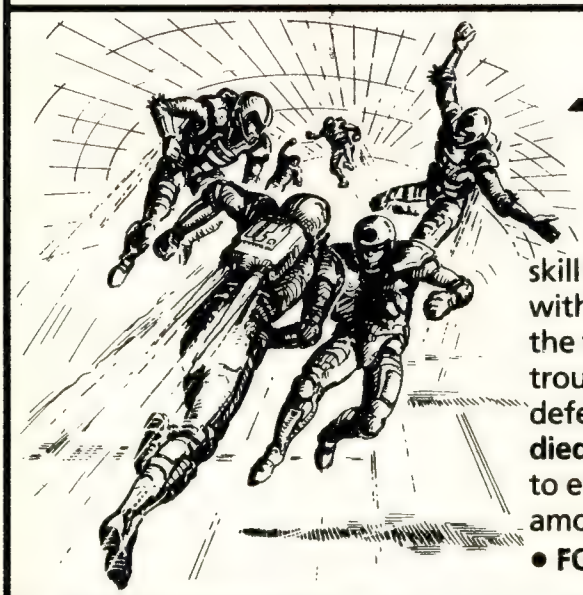

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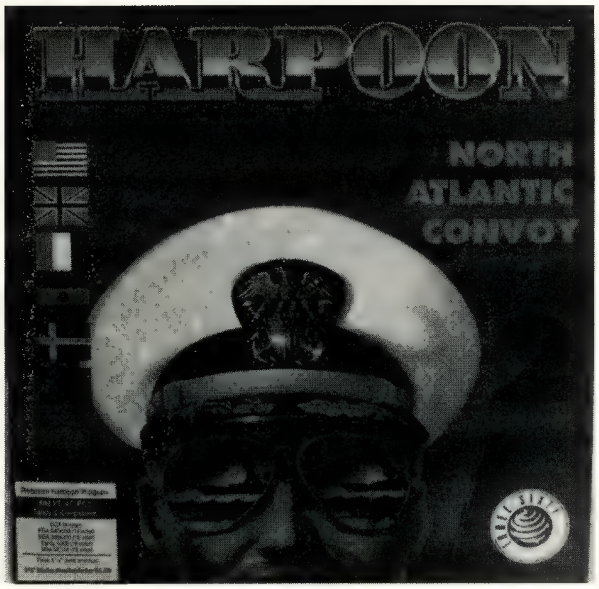
NORTH ATLANTIC CONVOYS

Harpoon Battleset 2

by Sandy Eisen



Designed by Leslie D Hill, Don Gilman and Larry Bond

Published by Three-Sixty

Price £24.99

Available for the PC

Available from Strategic Plus and other specialist retailers.

THIS SET of 16 scenarios, hereinafter called **NAC** for short, was the first 'add-on' product for **Harpoon** and appeared not very long after the original game.

The map area is extended all the way across the Atlantic to include the Canadian and US east coast, while still retaining the North sea and Norwegian sea areas which featured in the original Greenland Iceland United Kingdom Gap (**GIUK**) battleset.

The scenarios mostly emphasise actions arising from Soviet efforts to interfere with the major NATO convoys crossing the Atlantic to resupply Europe. In addition to US and UK forces, French and Spanish units are also available for escort. These are both new and will be described below. Unfortunately Norway seems to have left NATO as no Norwegian units or bases are included, and in several scenarios this is highly significant. Presumably this omission has come about because of lack of space in the battleset. I do not know for sure whether the relevant factor is shortage of disk space, or a maximum size limit for each battleset, but I suspect it is the latter.

Data Overload

I believe the problem may arise because of the way **Harpoon** handles battleset data. What seems to happen is that the program reads all unit information needed for a particular battleset into memory before starting the game. Presumably this approach allows faster running than accessing the data from disc during the course of the game. But it also means that each battleset can only hold a limited number of bases and unit types. I must emphasise that all this is uneducated speculation – I am not a programmer or any kind of computer expert. I would be interested to learn more from the game's designer or informed readers.

If I am right then it is a pity that the structure of **Harpoon** is such that the various battlesets can neither be fitted together, nor individually expanded to allow the creation of a single database containing all information so far published. **Harpoon** aficionados must hope that this failing will be firmly on the list of items to be corrected when (if?) the fabled 'Harpoon 2 for the 386' is ever designed.

Patriot For Me

Any revision must still be a long way off as **Harpoon** and its battlesets are still selling well. The latest rumours from the States suggest that Three-Sixty are busy working with the wargame designers at GDW on a land equivalent to **Harpoon**. The provisional title is said to be 'Patriot'!

I must admit that I do not find the selection of scenarios in **NAC** quite so satisfying as either of those in **GIUK** or the **Mediterranean Conflict** (Battleset 3, **MEDC** for short). The reason for this is a question of scale, meaning numbers of units involved, the area of manoeuvre and the time duration of the action. Both **GIUK** and **MEDC** contain scenarios which can be categorised as small, medium or large. My favourites tend to be the small or medium sized ones. Those in **NAC** are best described as either large or very large. This was a deliberate policy and seems to be what the American market demands. US players complained that none of the original **GIUK** scenarios included more than one carrier group on the NATO side. Several **NAC** scenarios include two or even three such groups.

There has been a similar expansion in the number of ships, subs and land-based aircraft available on each side. None of this is unreasonable or unrealistic. The US does have a dozen carriers and the USSR does have thousands of aircraft so a real war in the Atlantic could probably involve forces at least as large as those in the biggest scenarios. My argument is simply that it is more fun playing with less.

A major reason for this is that both players and the program can cope more easily. A NATO carrier air group includes nearly a hundred aircraft of various sorts, and I find it quite difficult and sufficiently stimulating to properly manage just one, never mind two or three different ones which may be carrying out different tasks.

Flash In The Can

Harpoon starts to slow down if you try to use a lot of time compression on very large scenarios. Unfortunately this is exactly when you do want the maximum amount of time compression. If you are sailing a large force several thousand miles and you have a week or so to do it in, then after sorting out patrols, formations, courses and so on, provided the enemy are nowhere to be seen you do not want to play in real time. Theoretically

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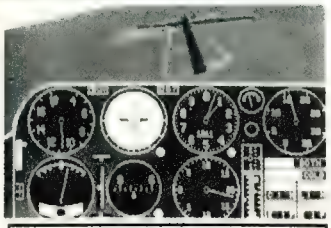

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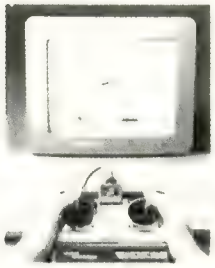

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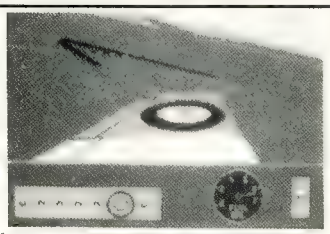

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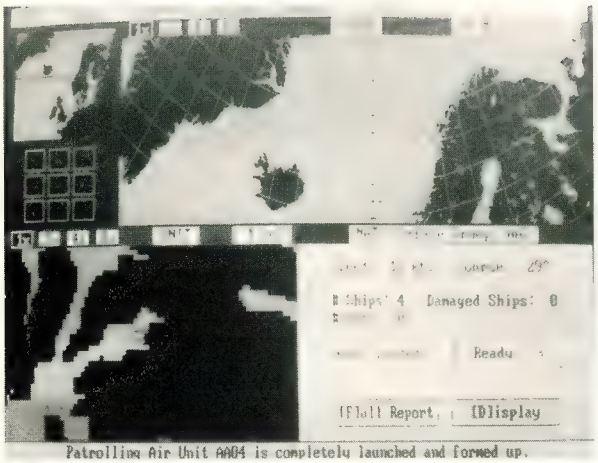

Harpoon offers time compression up to 1 second representing 30 minutes. This sounds adequate as on such a setting a day should flash by in less than a minute of real time. In practice the computer simply cannot keep up with all the calculations which are required, and with a 386 machine I find that not much time compression is available beyond about 1 second for 1 minute. The exact speed seems to depend on both the size of the scenario being played and how much is going on.

What all this means is that if your task force has a day or two of sailing before anything interesting is going to happen, then you can be waiting for half an hour or more before it does happen. It is easy to forget that the area of ocean available in **NAC** is far greater than that in **GIUK** and **MEDC**. The scenarios last longer as greater distances must be traversed. Another reason why I am not so fond of the **NAC** scenarios is the type of force mix they tend to contain. I find a combination of air, surface and submarine units on both sides to be the most interesting. However Soviet surface forces are present in only a minority of these scenarios as, quite realistically, Soviet power projection into the mid-Atlantic must rely mainly on submarines and long range land-based aircraft.

None of this is intended to decry the quality of the battleset which delivers exactly what it sets out to. I just find it more fun to escort a two ship convoy up the Norwegian coast for a day than to protect transatlantic sea lanes for a week.

New York Bombast

Bases are available on the continental USA, so a really energetic Soviet player can try to bombard New York or Boston among others. Be warned that this is not really on unless you are playing some strange new home-made scenario built with the editor. NATO bases are also available in France, Spain, Portugal and Canada, as well as the UK and Norway. The British Empire is represented by Gibraltar and Bermuda. A consequence of a these new bases is that far, far fewer bases are included on the UK mainland, Norway and the USSR as compared with **GIUK**.

Many new US ship classes are included. Some are specially relevant for convoy battles, such as the Arapahoe and Sacramento classes as well as container ships and tramp steamers. Others are new and very expensive fighting ships such as the Kidd and Arleigh Burke guided missile destroyers. The latter has the firepower of a cruiser, but since it costs a lot more than many of the older US cruisers perhaps this is to be allowed.

The emphasis on carrier operations is aided by the inclusion of conventionally powered Forrestal class carriers as well as the nuclear Nimitz class. To allow all these to fit, most of the special amphibious assault ships, the battleships and a few of the basic escort classes (all present in **GIUK**) have been dropped.

The French navy is well represented with the carrier Clemenceau, the helicopter carrier Jean d'Arc, and a full range of modern escorts including the Suffren and Georges Legues. Similarly the Spanish helicopter carrier and flagship Prince des Asturias can be screened by a variety of Spanish frigates.

Something Fishy

The Royal Navy still has the Invincible class present, but while **GIUK** included nearly every major escort class, about half of the types have been dropped from **NAC**. The only new British ship class to appear is the Fort class fleet auxiliary.

The Soviet navy has also been hit by the cuts, and has lost many surface classes and a few important submarines. The only new Soviet vessels included are also a fleet auxiliary type and some 'spy' trawlers. These are presumably supposed to help the Soviet intelligence gathering. In practice they add very little except to provide NATO aircraft with some target practice early in the war.

All the US and UK submarine classes which were present in **GIUK** have been retained. In addition, for those who thought that $500m was a lot for the improved Los Angeles class of nuclear hunter-killer submarines, the planned but so far unseen Seawolf is available at four times that price. A pair of more reasonably priced French submarine classes are also new. As might be expected, there is a good range of French aircraft types including the Super Etendard and some helicopters, together with Spanish helicopters and the Spanish version of the Harrier jump-jet somewhat appropriately called the Matador.

New British aircraft in **NAC** are the ground-attack version of the Tornado together with the Jaguar. The US air force receives F-111F Aardvark bombers as well as the electronic warfare version of the same aircraft known as the Raven. All these types had a high public profile during the Gulf War, and this does add interest. The Starlifter air transporter is also new, and in some scenarios air as well as sea transport must be escorted. The only new Soviet aircraft is a hypothetical fighter version of the Backfire bomber. By sending along a few Backfires carrying air-to-air missiles instead of bombs, the range of Soviet air cover can be greatly extended. This idea seems to work so well in the game that I will not be surprised to learn in the future that it has been tried in reality.

The Bottom Line

NAC can be recommended as a high quality package of programming and information which significantly extends the scope of an already excellent game. Next issue I shall continue with a close look at the **MEDC** battleset. SP

WE LIKE...

Red Baron
(PC)

Links
(PC)

ATP
(PC)

Pro Tennis Tour 2
(Amiga)

Monday Night Football
(PC, Amiga)

TOURNAMENT GOLF

V Necks At Dawn

by John Scott

I PLAYED a game of golf once, many years ago. It took me a totally ludicrous number of strokes to get round the course. At one point I escaped injury by inches as a ball whizzed past my face, and overall the trauma was such that every subsequent invitation from golfing friends makes me remember all sorts of obscure prior appointments while privately endorsing Mark Twain's statement that Golf is 'A good walk spoiled'.

In spite of all this I was looking forward to taking my chances with **Tournament Golf**, another addition to the rapidly expanding field of golf sims. In this tournament the player is invited to play on three international courses against fifteen other professionals.

On loading up the game it is possible to choose either tournament play or practice. If the player wisely decides to opt for practice several other options are offered (one or two players, match play or a basic practice round). In two-player mode it is possible to play the computer. It's a pity that this game caters for only two human players, as I feel that these games are a lot more fun as multi-player efforts.

Death By Driving

In tournament play, which appears to be the real *raison d'etre* of the game, a single human player must play twelve rounds against fifteen computer opponents.

The tournament is played out over twelve rounds, most of which are played as stroke play, but the seventh and eleventh are played as match games. In the event of a tie there is a 'sudden death' play-off during a match game. During stroke play positions are assigned by the computer without a play off.

Excellence in successive rounds is rewarded by increased expertise. When the player wins a round or finishes in the top eight his expertise increases by one level. In practical terms this means that increased power extends the flying distance of the ball, controlled slicing and hooking is easier, and the caddy's advice will vary from utterly basic (such as providing the distance to the hole) to quite helpful (distance to both hole and target point, wind effect and how to master it, and how to manage the strategy of the lie).

Graphically the game is adequate and reasonably well laid out: Everything you would expect to see in a computer golf game is there, but **Tournament Golf** is far behind the superlative graphics of a game like **Links**. The bird's eye view takes up the left side of the screen and the right depicts the usual behind-the-golfer view.

A number of on-screen icons enable the player to access information on matters such as wind speed, position of ball, leg position, club selection etc. A shot-target mark facilitates the aiming of the ball, and the obligatory power/height gauge provides the key to the perfect swing. When the ball enters the putting green a close up of the green fills the screen. Here it is possible to control the direction and power of the putt, and therefore compensate for the contours of the green and the direction in which the grass are growing (both of which factors will affect the ball).

Unsound Comment

The sound in **Tournament Golf** is just downright annoying, but at least it can be turned off. I couldn't help but feel that a little bit of speech synthesis (commentator's remarks or caddy's advice) would have lifted the game considerably.

So what's the bottom line? Well, **Tournament Golf** does everything it claims to do, but it does it in a decidedly average way. I think that even some of the older golf games (such as **Leaderboard**) would score higher in a play off than **Tournament Golf.** SF

Designed by Sega

Published by Elite

Price £16.99

Available for the ST and Amiga Reviewed on the Amiga

Playing the field, continued from page 41

Even if a whitewash ensues, the player still qualifies to play in the French Open. Only these two matches may be played in easy mode. Apart from some hints on serving, the manual offers few tips on strategy other than to parrot the obvious, such as 'use the serve as an offensive attack'. Help, however, in the shape of a ball machine, is at hand.

The limitations of a joystick-based game are more than made up by the excitement generated not only on court, but on working your way up the rankings. As always with such games, the two (human) player version is superior. Altogether it's an excellent sim, but one that should be exceeded by **Pro Tennis Tour 2** – due for release as you read this. Watch out also for **Sports Simulated Tennis**, coming from Brøderbund this autumn.

People are on the pitch...

But it's not over by a long shot. The quality of sports games continues to improve. Unfortunately these improvements tend to occur only in sports that are already well covered by quality software. The lack of a decent soccer or cricket simulation is a disgrace, with some of the current offerings in these areas bordering on fraud. Programs like **Earl Weaver Baseball** and **Wayne Gretzky 2** show what just what can be done in covering all aspects of their respective sports. The best hope is that the American software houses will take heed of the fact that the World Cup is due to take place in the US in 1994 and act accordingly. SF

*Thanks to John Harrington and George Campbell for assistance with **Head Coach v 3.0** and **Pro Football Simulator** respectively.*

Team files for Earl Weaver Baseball, TV Sports Basketball, John Madden Football, Wayne Gretzky Hockey, plus new courses for Jack Nicklaus golf, can be downloaded from the sports games library on Compuserve Tel 0800 289 458

MiG-29

News from the fence, by Paul Rigby

Designed by
Simis

Published by
Domark

Price
£19.99

Available for PC, ST and Amiga
Reviewed on the PC

MIG-29 IS the new flight simulation from Domark. The game involves piloting said aircraft within the Soviet sphere of influence over six missions. These include a recce mission to note the conning tower serial number of a submarine; shadowing aircraft out of Soviet airspace and an air-to-ground attack on a refinery. The main novelty, besides the aircraft simulated, is the variety locations – China, for example.

Rather than give a standard review we thought we would take a rather more in-depth look at the game and its designers The Kremlin and Simis (the core programming team – the guys with the flight model technology and scenario design). Before I delve into **MiG-29** itself, what of Simis? What is the team's background and how did it develop the game?

Boxed Set

Simis developed software and hardware for test rigs for British Aerospace which would test real flight software. These were effectively simulators that tested the black boxes rather than the simulators that teach the pilot to fly. In support to that, in the research role, it developed outside world systems and flight models which would allow the pilot to sit in and fly around the world realistically. So if you had the pilot flying realistically you would have realistic inputs into the test rigs which would then test the actual test programs.

The Simis team has considerable experience in flight simulation software for the home market. Remember **Interdictor 1 & 2** for the Archimedes? Yep, same people. They approached Domark with the technology, asked what the company thought about the idea of producing a flight simulator, Domark said 'Sure, how about basing it upon a MiG-29?' – and the rest, as the saying goes, is so many floppy disks.

Vague Model

The MiG-29 is not the most well known aircraft (technically) in the world. Did the team have much trouble obtaining information about the flight model?

Jonathan Newth of Simis takes up the story: 'The initial information was taken out of Salamander books. It was vague but enough to get us started. Then we used an article written by John Farley for *Flight International,* the result of a test flight he did at Farnborough. We used the figures he produced as a result of that. These described the flight envelope very accurately. Thus we could tune our model. Then we had him come down and fly it and tell us where we got it wrong and where we got it right. From the responses we were able to give the model further fine tuning. One result was that we moved the undercarriage back along the fuselage by about a metre. Subtle effects like that which has an effect on the unstick speed when you take off.'

I can summarise **MiG-29** in a few words: an excellent flight model (you have the choice of two flight models on the PC, a standard and advanced version which takes more processing power. The advanced mode is superb), but a lack of graphic detail and an insufficient number of missions. Six missions is hardly enough to warrant the high price asked. I put this opinion to Jonathan:

'The actual timescales that we were working under meant that we couldn't put a vast array of missions in there. Actually, games today appear to be of the type were there are lots of sub-missions that vary very slightly but are, essentially, identical.'

The advanced flight model offered by **MiG-29** is excellent and, funnily enough, reminds me of the products offered by Spectrum Holobyte. You may know that SH is about to release **Falcon 3.0**, a new flight simulation with many improvements over the original **Falcon**. One of those improvements is the flight model itself. It recognises a maths co-processor in an effort to make the flight model more realistic. Yet The Kremlin and Simis have managed to take their **MiG-29** model to new heights without recourse to such an aid – how?

'I've actually spoken to some of the guys doing that, though not in great detail, but they've been using floating point – which is why they need the maths co-processor. Whereas we have managed to get it in 32-bit integers. There is a lot of scaling and shifting going on and we were desperately trying to stop the quantities from overflowing while still maintaining accuracy.'

So why hasn't Spectrum Holobyte taken advantage of this method of programming?

'I guess, because we are more experienced. We have had the advantage that we've been working in a very similar field in British Aerospace in a research section. So we had a certain amount of leisure to develop that type of model and experiment with various techniques.

'In that environment, the floating

point performance on a Silicon Graphics (a workstation) was sufficient to emulate the model accurately. We actually did that using integers rather than a floating point [maths] co-processor.

After talking to Jonathan I drew the conclusions that **MiG-29** was just the first stage in a long-term project of increasingly superior flight simulations. Actually, it is a sensible and structured approach. With **MiG-29** there is an excellent flight model, the sequel will introduce extra missions progressing on to a world simulation approach that is being addressed by the new generation of flight simulations. Actually, they have, considering their limited time, done very well.

'That level of simulation [the world simulation] is something we invested a lot of development resources in. The reason it is not in **MiG-29** was lack of time. It takes many months to tune a world simulation and we developed the whole thing in just over two months from scratch.'

Apparently, **MiG-29 II**, to be released around next Christmas, will be one scenario with umpteen sub-missions before the objective is reached. The size of the land area will be about the same size as the last mission in the original game, with more ground detail and ground simulation (trucks carrying tanks, helicopters, and so on). There will also be an intelligent enemy. For example, hit a bridge and the train will not cross but the bridge will be repaired in time. There will also be a head-to-head feature included so that two machines can be plugged in, enabling null-modem flying with a friend.

Pilot's Friend

On to specifics now and a few hints and tips to help you along from one of **MiG-29**'s co-designers, Jonathan Newth again:

'The enemy aircraft have a realistic flight envelope so they cannot turn circles on you without losing speed so that you can tail-chase them.'

In addition, the enemy have finite weapons and fuel (types and quantities do vary between aircraft). So when they run out of weapons and/or fuel they will fly back to the nearest base and land to re-fuel. If you can engage them, while surviving, they are very easy to pick off once they break off and return to base. 'The modelling of the missiles themselves results in a less than 100% hit rate. If you have a green lock you have a 30-40% chance of a kill, a red lock approaches a 100% chance of a kill. Also if you are flying at 90 degrees to an aircraft your missile is going to have to fly about a 90g turn to hit it! It is not capable of that (about 30g maybe) so they'll miss.

You can get a fairly high kill rate if you fly head-to-head with the enemy as you can get a red-lock. Also this is a good time to fire at an aircraft even if you haven't got a red lock because the opposing aircraft may be locking on you! Fire at him and give him something else to think about!

Speaking about flight models, each one of your cannon bullets has a flight model! So each bullet will fall away once fired requiring a reasonable 'lead' to be placed upon the enemy. That is, fire where you think the aircraft will be in a second or two. Practise times and distances and you'll crack leading.

Red Horizon

A general hint on all the missions is: 'There are a number of different type of target (truck, shed, aircraft hanger). It is worth prioritising which one of those targets should be hit first. On the Chinese mission if you go for the planes rather than the hanger first then the hangers will generate more aircraft so you could be there for ever. So stick below the radar horizon, below a 100 metres, and take out the hanger – then the aircraft.'

Ditto for the Red scenario with the trucks and the truck sheds, by-the-way. In the Blue mission in the Arctic keep below the radar horizon. Also, the Harrier behaviour is governed by your own because of an aggression factor. So if you're just flying along below the radar horizon they will be placed upon the lowest aggression factor. Once you start firing they get very aggressive.

'That is true in all scenarios but most evident in the Arctic one.'

In the sea-base scenario take out the MTB boats which have SAM launches before anything else. Otherwise, when you jump up above 100 metres to begin your attack you'll suddenly find a couple of SAMs on your tail. Chaff is fairly effective for SAMs, though. Another tip (for all you cheats out there) is to jump to enemy view when facing a long-range enemy aircraft. This will tell you what he is up to, what direction he is facing, and so on.

'One of the RAF chaps who has been flying this noted, and I don't know how accurate this is, is that when firing Air-to-Air missiles below the aspect of the enemy while on a tail-chase the missile will explode upon the heat-plume rather than on the aircraft. Flying from above results in a higher chance of hitting the actual aircraft.'

Happy hunting. SP

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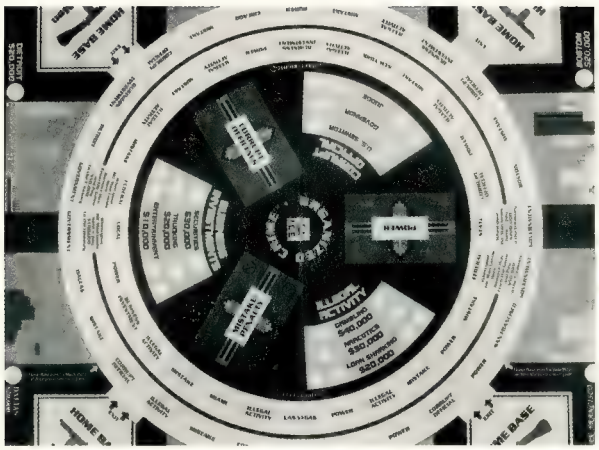
ORGANIZED CRIME

Pimps And Perps

by Brian Walker



FIRST published in the golden era of boardgames circa 1972, **Organized Crime** has enjoyed something of a cult reputation since its untimely demise. But now it is back, and in a new box with cover art every bit as crap as the original. No doubt ICE will claim this was a design decision to satisfy the purists. After removing the hand that was shielding your eyes from the repellent graphic, you will discover some components floating around in the box. No doubt they are wondering what happened to the component tray. But let us not carp. In these days you can't even get a decent teddy bear for twenty five quid let alone a good game. And this *is* a good game.

Guys And Molls

Organized Crime takes place in no specific time period, though clearly it was an era when men were hoods and girls were molls. The objective is to be the sole surviving 'boss'. To ensure survival hit men need to be hired, rackets need to be exploited, and public officials need to be bribed. At first sight the gameboard looks to resemble that of a conventional 'track game'. And sure enough, movement is by die roll. However, players have an interesting choice of movement. The hit men, whom you have just hired, are the pieces that move around the board. The sum of two dice may be divided between two of them. Or, it is possible to nominate just one to move providing this is done before the dice are rolled.

The key decision is not really movement, but precisely how many hit men you hire, and, whether or not these are merely going to protect the boss in the home base or travel around the board doing dirty deeds. The home bases are the key areas on the board. Once a home base is successfully invaded the owning player is out of the game. Before any such invasion can be contemplated, the hoods must traverse the board in order to raise cash.

The primary source of income comes from control of the six cities on the board. The first such unowned city you land on is yours without argument. However, if an attempt is made to control new cities, then permission must be sought from the other bosses. And now the fun begins.

Extreme Prejudice

Before a vote is taken bribes can be offered and legs can be broken. This is a game of negotiation with a vengeance. Eventually players declare their *real* intentions (deals are non binding). In true democratic style the players with the most resources are allowed the most votes. Similar pow wows take place whenever a player seeks to control a new racket, or make a 'business investment'.

When they are not welshing on deals, the hoods mooch around the board being generally unpleasant. This can culminate in a 'hit'. When an opponent's 'soldier' gets a little too close to your territory, he can be eliminated by a combination of power cards and die roll. If such a hit takes place the court of summary justice convenes again to decide if such a display of extreme prejudice was really necessary. Votes are again take in the usual manner. If the offender is found guilty then he must draw a penaltycard.

The Big Easy

Eventually a player will want to go for the big hit and attempt to rub out an opponent's boss in his home base. Such an assault must be declared in advance. The attacker then rolls the dice and says a prayer. Any power cards that have been collected are added to the roll. To move to the base takes up part of the die roll, and to enter the base the uses up one more from the roll. Eliminating any bodyguards present takes 1 off the dice for each, and then entering the boss's inner sanctum requires yet another point. It can be seen that before such attacks are executed the probability of success has to be carefully weighed.

The rules of the game are explained very clearly and plenty of examples of play are provided. The game is rightly regarded as a minor classic. Some may not care for the elimination aspect and its antisocial implication, but as a full game seldom lasts more than 90 minutes this is not too much of a problem. Certainly some caution must be exercised at the start of the game to ensure survival. Protection of the home base is essential unless you want to be the one putting the kettle on.

I suspect that ICE has republished this game because its staff enjoy it so much themselves. And long may they continue to do so. Here's to crime! SP

Designed by
James Koplow

Published by
Iron Crown Enterprises

Price £24.99

2-4 players

KINGDOM

An Adventure In King Arthur's Court

by Gordon Sweeney

KINGDOM is a simple two to six player wargame. Each player takes the role of a contender for the throne of Britain and wins by being the last one alive. It has clearly been a labour of love but what you get inside the beautifully illustrated box is of mixed quality. Like the box, the board is very attractive but is of the jigsaw variety and prone to warping. While the 'gold' pieces are quite impressive, the knight and foot soldier counters are somewhat plain. Additionally, some of the colours are very hard to tell apart. The problem is compounded during play as the colour coding of villages on the board is even worse. There are six challenger record cards which are plastic coated so felt tipped pens can be used on them. From a presentational point of view, the remaining components – the riddle, fortune and guardian cards as well as the 'lore and legend' background booklet and the rule book are all excellent.

Holy Grail!

There is no indication as to the preferred number of players, which is strange since the character of the game changes significantly with each number. This is largely due to the bidding system and the effects of finding the Holy Grail. With less than six players, the territories of any unchosen contenders are allocated to the highest bidder(s). The amount bid is the amount that must then be paid every turn by the controlling player. Since each of these territories has a known income each turn anyway, the value of each is too easy to assess and so bidding doesn't seem to work too well in this situation.

Surprisingly, none of the contenders (not even Arthur) bestows any advantage whatsoever on their forces in combat, so they can either stay at home or seek for the Grail. This involves visiting magical sites and fighting their guardians. Players can be knocked out of the game by their contenders being killed by a guardian. However if the guardian (generated by drawing a card from the guardian deck) is vanquished, then the token in that square can be turned over – eight of them are blanks and one is the Grail. Unfortunately, as no two counters are same it's not hard to tell which is the Grail from the back.

Once the Grail is discovered, the contender must correctly answer a riddle to get it. The riddle cards are absolutely superb – sadly though, this is the only instance in the game when they are used. The first advantage of possessing the Grail is that your troops use the blue die in combat – no big deal since you get to use it anyway by having a knight present in a battle. Secondly, rather than paying each turn for any allegiances that you bid for at the start of the game, you now collect this amount instead! This will not be applicable in a six player game. With a lesser number it will be a huge boost to anyone with allegiances and useless to the rest.

Battling guardians is a good way of gaining the 13 chivalry points required to enter Camelot and thus accrue an extra 25 gold coins per turn. However, this only lasts until the last magic token is turned over. In my experience this will happen about the time someone gets to Camelot, if not before. There is a problem of timing here as this part of the game will probably be over before the war starts hotting up.

Die In Blue

Kingdom might still have been saved by an exciting or slick combat system. It has neither. In a round of battle, each side rolls either the red die (a D6) or the blue die (a D6+1) and consults the combat tables. There is nothing to account for having a larger force than an opponent except that a bigger force will probably survive for more rounds (there is no retreat option). As it stands, though, it is quite possible for a tiny force to exterminate a huge one. What makes this unacceptable is that each side pays a wage per unit before a battle, but the winner collects the loser's payments. Thus a large force has nothing to gain from attacking a smaller one and everything to lose. Since each player starts the game with so much money (the same however many are playing) massive armies can be bought. If these are used sensibly (in small forces) **Kingdom** will drag on and on as they are gradually whittled away.

In short, **Kingdom** has neither the richness of a complex design nor the elegance of a simple one. Despite the appearance of tournament and magic item cards in the fortune card deck it lacks the sparkle that might have lifted it out of the ordinary. SP

WE LIKE...

Airlines (Abacus)

Line in the Sand (TSR)

Tyranno Ex (Moskito)

Republic of Rome (Avalon Hill)

Shattered States (EMS)

RED EMPIRE

Half Open Door

by John Harrington

FOR A WHILE back there it looked as if glasnost and perestroika would put an end to the appeal of Soviet politics as a suitable subject for games, but Boris Yeltsin has thankfully put paid to all that. Now, not so hard on the heels of **Kremlin**, we have **Red Empire**, a card game based around power struggles in the upper echelons of Soviet government.

Party Poopers

Each player represents a government faction, and the aim of the game is to use political clout to purge members of rival factions without going too far and endangering the stability of the government. A faction consists of a number of leaders drawn from the ranks of some or all of the three power bases: the Party, the Military and the KGB. At the beginning of the game the players receive 3, 4 or 5 leader cards, depending on how many players there are. The leader cards are placed face up in front of the owning player so that all players can see the stature rating of each leader and the power base to which he belongs. The stature rating is merely a number ranging from 5 to 9 and represents how difficult it is to purge him. At this point players tot up the stature totals of all their leaders and the faction with the highest total getting to appoint one of his faction as the president, provided that one of his leaders is a member of the Party. Otherwise the president card is passed to the next strongest eligible faction.

From a different deck of cards, players are then dealt five cards face down. These cards may then be played in a player's turn or occasionally out of turn when the government is facing a crisis. Play proceeds in a clockwise fashion starting with the player on the president's left, and takes the form of replenishing one's hand up to five cards, playing all crisis and mandate cards and then, at the player's discretion, playing either an action card to attack another leader or an option card.

State Independence

Crisis cards represent a problem for the government, such as a declaration of independence by Lithuania. The severity of the crisis is represented by a number ranging from 4 to 8. All factions are invited to contribute to the solving of the crisis, which is achieved by one round of optional playing of action cards. If the value of the action cards exceeds the value of the crisis then the crisis is resolved immediately, even if some players have not yet had the chance to offer assistance. The president receives one victory point for every crisis solved, whilst those who helped resolve the crisis receive victory points equal to the value of the action card they played. If the crisis is not solved, the president must retire from politics and his position is filled by a party member of a different faction (the strongest eligible faction). The crisis card is placed on the unsolved crises discard pile and a check is made to see whether the value of the cards in this pile equals or exceeds 18; if it does then *all* players lose. This must have seemed a clever wheeze at the time but it is an open invitation to competitive players to engineer a succession of unrewarding 'No Wins', and can only encourage said players to play something else in future.

Mandate and option cards generally improve or temporarily undermine the stature of individual leaders or whole factions. As in **Kremlin**, there is the possibility of one or more leaders snuffing it, but the method used to determine this lacks the morbid joy of the **Kremlin** system. Indeed, the whole game shows up very poorly in comparison with **Kremlin**, both in terms of originality of ideas and the spirit in which those ideas are executed. The one good game mechanic in **Red Empire** concerns the playing of action cards in purges, and even this is not very innovative.

Enemies In Sight

Action cards have numerical values, representing the number of 'hits' inflicted by that action on the victim's stature. As in **Enemy In Sight**, several players may have a bash at a leader to weaken him, but it is the player who applies the coup de grace who scoops the victory points. So far, so unoriginal. However, action cards are colour coded according to the power base that may use them. Thus if you have a red action card, representing an action that may be performed by a Party official, but you have no Party members in your faction, you may not play that action card. Furthermore, a leader may not instigate a purge against a leader from the same power base, although he may contribute to a purge already in progress. What this means is that the

Designed by
Frank Chadwick

Published by
GDW

Price £9.99

3-6 players

first purge card played on, for instance, a KGB member, cannot be a KGB action card. A further restriction is that only one action card of each colour may be played on a leader, although the existence of grey action cards, which may be played by the president, does enlarge the range of cards available for purges.

This system is neat and provides what little atmosphere there is in the game, although it does completely knacker the player who gets dealt leaders all of the same power base, as I did in my first game. This element of ingenuity is not enough to salvage the game, which quickly degenerates into a process of attacking whichever faction has the most victory points and which does not even offer a suitably vicious or satisfying method of doing so. The inclusion of a No Win option completes the slitting of the game's own throat and although the game system is not fatally flawed I could not find anything in it to persuade me to play this in preference to the admittedly excellent **Kremlin**. SP

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RAILS EAST

Strategy in Hans im Glück's 1835, by Martin Croft

FEW SERIOUS gamers will need to be told much about the '18' family of games. For anyone who has managed to get this far without being exposed to Francis Tresham's seminal railway game, **1829**, and its various descendants, a quick recap.

Players buy shares in railway companies: the player with the largest shareholding in a company controls it, and decides where it will build track (by placing large tiles on the map-board), what trains it will purchase and operate, and whether or not it will pay out a dividend to shareholders. Share values go up if dividends are paid, down if money is retained for the company's use. At the end of the game, the player with the most wealth either in cash or in the value of share-holdings, is the winner of the game.

The beauty of the **1829** system is that players can enjoy themselves building railway networks, or by being ruthless business tycoons. It is possible to have enormous fun but still finish last.

There are now five games in the 'series': two involve building railways in Great Britain and are **1829** (Northern Board) and **1829** (Southern Board), both published by Hartland Trefoil. The two can be combined and played as one. **1830** is the Avalon Hill Games Company's adaptation of the **1829** system for the east coast of North America, and introduces certain elements which make it a far more cut-throat game than the rather genteel **1829**. Hartland Trefoil's **1853** is set in India, and is even less 'competitive' than **1829**. Now comes **1835**, which applies the **1829** system to the development of railways in Germany.

This article is a look at **1835**, and some suggestions for optimum strategies. It is by no means exhaustive; the game has only been available for a few months, and contains a number of innovations which make it very different from its predecessors.

Out Of The Sheds

The first share dealing round takes a little while to get used to. All the private companies, all the minor companies, the directors' shares in the Bayerische and Sachsische and three of the Bayerische 10% shares (the ones without prices printed on) are placed in four rows on a flat clean surface as shown in the illustration headed Aktien-Startpaket (see illustration XX).

Once you have determined which order the players will buy in, the first player can buy any share on the top row. Whenever there is only one share in a row, however, the player whose turn it is also has the option of buying the leftmost share on the next row down, unless all the shares on that next row are gone, in which case the player is restricted to either buying the one share available or passing. This means that the first player to buy can either buy the Nurnberg-Furth private railway for 100m, or the Bergisch-Marckische Bahn minor company for 80m.

Basically, the peculiarities of the starting process mean that there is enormous scope for tactical buying in the initial share buying round. Indeed, the existence of so many 20% shares in various companies and the peculiarities of the way companies come to the market means that tactical share buying features heavily throughout the game. Tactical share selling, though, is less important than in **1830**, because whereas in the American version you can drive the share price down, for example, four levels by selling four shares at once, in 1835, each sale, no matter how many shares are sold, only drops the price one level. Thus, to knock the share price down four levels, you have to sell four shares in four separate share dealing rounds.

To return to the starting packet: however many people are playing, there will always be enough money for everything in the starting packet to be bought. This does not necessarily mean, though, that everything has to be bought in the first share dealing round. Any items not sold have to be sold in a subsequent share dealing round before any other shares are available.

Train Pass

Tactically, it may literally pay you to pass, if by so doing you end the share dealing round: any players who own private railways will get income in the subsequent operating round. This could be especially useful if the Bayerische and/or the Sachsische are not yet floated and you do not have any shares in them, but you do own one or more private railways: you get a return on your money, while anybody with money in the Bayerische/Sachsische does not. It also gives the minor companies a head start on the two initial share

1835 was designed by Michael Meier-Bachl and is published by Hans im Glück. It is available in the UK from specialist game shops.

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companies which may be launched at the beginning of the game.

Simple calculations show that the starting packet costs a total of 1684m. Starting money for the players, and the most shares which can theoretically be bought, is as follows:

Three players: 600m each = 1800: all starting packet, plus one Bayerische or Sachsische share.

Four players: 475m each = 1900: all SP, plus two Bayerische or two Sachsische or one of each.

Five players: 390m each = 1950: all SP, plus two Bayerische or three Sachsische or one Bayerische and one Sachsische.

Six players: 340m each = 2040: all SP plus three Bayerische or four Sachsische.

Seven players: 310 each = 2,170: all SP, plus five Bayerische or five Sachsische.

In a three or four player game, the Sachsische cannot possibly be floated in the first share dealing round because there is not enough money initially for 50% of its shares to be bought. After all the SP has been bought, another three 10% shares must be bought to get the Sachsische running. Only with five or more players in the game is there a possibility of getting the Sachsische operating in the first operating round – but not a certainty. This means that the purchaser of the Leipzig-Dresdner Bahn will be assured of at least 40m revenue in a game with three or four players, and 20m revenue in a game with five or more players, possibly more. The L-D costs 190m, but gives you 20% of the Sx, with a share price of 88m initially. So, in a three/four player game, it is theoretically worth 216m, plus whatever you will get in dividends. On the down side, your money will be locked in until at least the third share dealing round, and may be tied up for longer, if the Sx is not floated on the second SDR: the rules are that you may not sell shares in the First SDR, and you cannot sell shares in a company which is not yet floated. Remember also that the company will not be able to pay a dividend in its first operating round, so if you do sell at the first opportunity, the shares will have dropped to 84m each.

But the L-D is a good buy, in my opinion, especially if you get the chance to also buy the Magdeburger Bahn (minor company #3): if the launch of the Sx is delayed, you can use #3 to build routes for it. It will also generate income for you, which you can add to the L-D's income and use to buy more Sx stock.

Hamburg East

Another excellent initial combination are the Berlin-Potsdamer Bahn (MC#2) and the Berlin-Stettiner Bahn (MC#5). #2 builds in to Hamburg, while #5 links in to the East Prussia off board area. While income generated in the first couple of operating rounds is relatively low, once green tiles are available and both companies have two trains you can easily get 130m and upwards in your pocket every operating round.

Running the Bergische-Markische Bahn (MC#1) and the Koln-Mindener Bahn (MC#4) together can also be a good strategy. While MC#1 can screw MC#4 very easily, that doesn't necessarily mean they work all that well together in the initial stages of the game. Until green tiles are available, revenue will be low: however, when green tiles become available, the area of the board they are operating in becomes increasingly more valuable.

Personally, I think the Altona-Kiel Bahn is a complete waste of time, but I know others who disagree. I wouldn't buy it unless there wasn't anything else going.

Prussia House

If you ever have the chance to buy three or more minor companies, then do so, irrelevant of which ones they are. The revenue generated quickly adds up, and they also give you chunks of the Prussian. If you have set your eyes on the Prussian right from the start, then it is easily possible to secure a very handsome stake in the initial SDR. In a seven player game, one player can get 20% straight off: this ranges up to 25% in a five player game, 30% in a four player game and 35% in a three player game. Given that 40% of the Prussian is retained for later sale, a player with 20% or more who manipulates his hand so as to be in a good position to buy those four 10% shares when they become available could easily end up with 50% plus. The Prussian, if run properly, can easily generate revenues of 1000m plus an OR, and its share price starts at 154m.

Another strategy which you may want to follow from the initial SDR is to go hell for leather for the Bayerische. It has high potential revenue, and, given that its share price starts at the highest level of all companies except the Prussian, a large stake in the Bayerische tends to mean the player will end up in first or second position. And if anyone can build a large stake in both the Bayerische and the Sachsische, then they are likely to run away with the game, barring total incompetence at running railways.

In a three player game, one player could only buy up to 50% of the Bayerische (although 600m is enough for six Bayerische shares at 92m each, three of the shares in the SP are bundled with private railways, costing 100m, 120m and 150m): 50% in a four player game; 40% in a five player game; and 30% in a six or seven player game. To be honest, if anyone gets 40%, the other players will have to be very careful not to let them get the magic 50%.

Tactical share dealing is also important later in the game, perhaps more than in other '18' games. While the opportunities to manipulate the share price are less than in **1830**, in **1835** buying one share can trigger a variety of options for the next player.

Once the SP has been sold, the remaining shares are sold in three stages. The remaining Bayerische and Sachsische are available first: once these have all been sold, the Badische, Wurtemburgische and Hessische shares are placed in the spaces at the bottom of the share chart, and the director's share in the Badische is offered for sale. Shares in the Wurtemburgische are not available until 50% of the Badische shares have been sold, and in the Hessische until 50% of the Wurtemburgische have been sold. Once all shares in the Badische, Wurtemburgische and Hessische have been sold, the third stage, the Mecklenburg Schwerin and the Oldenburgische are laid out. Again, once 50% of the Mecklenburg Schwerin are sold, players can buy Oldenburgische shares. Also, the moment the director's share in the Badische is bought, the four 10% shares in the Prussian are available as an alternative to whatever other shares are currently on offer.

Certifiable

So buying the last Bayerische or Sachsische share gives the next player the opportunity to pick up a 20% certificate – always better than two 10% certificates, whether it is the director's share or not. Later on, buying the penultimate Badische share reveals the 'Letzte Aktie' – an-

other 20% certificate (Note: it says 10% on it: this is wrong. It is a 20% certificate). On the other hand, there may be times when it suits a player to give someone else the opportunity to buy a 20% share, as it can either lead to a change in a directorship or make one more secure.

I have concentrated on grand strategy in this article, mainly because you should always work out your strategy first, then develop tactics to support it. Another good reason is that it's going to take me a few more games before I can work out the best tactics: indeed, with another dozen games under my belt, I may have radically changed my ideas on strategy. Anyway, working out a strategy and sticking to for as long as it is working is vitally important. Don't be seduced by what may appear to be cheap gains: remember, your certificate holdings are limited. Remember also the advantages of having 80% of a company.

On the other hand, don't be afraid to dump a strategy if it is not working (or if somebody else obviously has gone for the same strategy). The last game I played, I and another player both lost badly because we got locked into a power struggle over control of the Prussian: we plunged heavily into the purchaseable shares as soon as they became available, thus locking up huge amounts of cash, when our money would have been far better used buying shares in the smaller share companies.

Stationary Block

One important point to remember, though, is that only the Bayerische, the Badische and the Prussian can ever buy more than one station in addition to their starting stations. So if you are ever director of one of the other companies, be very careful as to where you place your one free token: and don't forget, you should be looking for offensive possibilities as well as defensive. A token which blocks a valuable route controlled by another player could mean the difference between winning and losing.

Final note: the English translation I have is WRONG in the phase change section. Phase three only starts when the first 5 train is bought, not when the first 4 train is bought. Use the reference card in the game for the correct effects of train purchase.

Initially, share companies (Aktiengesellschaften) are limited to four trains, while minor companies (Vorpreussische Gesellschaften) are limited to two trains. There is no change when the first 2+2 train is bought. When the first 3 train is bought, the game moves to phase two. Trains can be bought and sold between minor companies, green tiles can be used, there are two operating rounds between share dealing rounds and share companies can only lay one tile per round instead of the two which they can lay in phase 1. When the first 3+3 is bought, there is no change. When the first 4 train is bought, 2 trains become obsolete and are removed from play. Share companies can only own three trains, while minor companies are limited to one train.

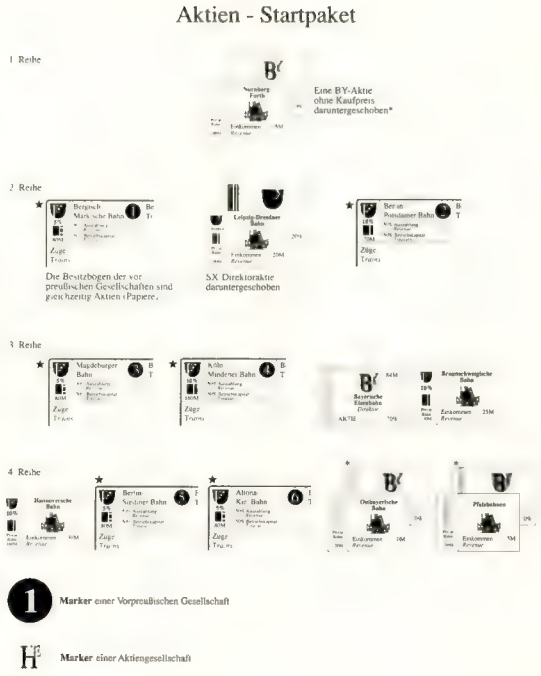
Swap Shop

The owner of the Berlin-Potsdamer minor company (MC#2) may declare the Prussian open and swap MC#2 for the director's share of the Prussian (a 10% share). The Prussian is limited to four trains, one more than other share companies. The holders of the other minor companies and of the Braunschweigische and Hannoversche private railways can if they wish swap them for certificates in the Prussian. Immediately the first 4+4 train is bought, 2+2 trains are obsolete. The holder of MC#2 must declare the Prussian open, if he has not already done so.

Immediately the first 5 train is bought, all private companies are closed and all minor companies must be converted into Prussian shares (as are the Hannoversche and Braunschweigische) if not already converted. The maximum number of trains for share companies becomes two, and the Prussian three. After the next share dealing round, there are three ORs between share dealing rounds. Once the first 5+5 train is bought, there is no change. Once the first 6 train is bought, 3 trains are obsolete. Once the first 6+6 train is bought, 3+3 trains become obsolete.

An oddity of the Prussian seems to be that it can operate with only 10% of the shares issued.

This article, if not exactly guaranteeing that your trains will run on time, should ensure that they are there at the finish. SP



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WARS IN THE MAIL

The pleasures and pains of play-by-mail gaming, by Nicky Palmer

PLAYERS OF the classic SPI **War in the East** boardgame used to say that the game seemed to prove that all that stood between Hitler and victory was a decent rail repair corps, since the slow conversion of rail supply was the main constraint on the rampaging Germans. Pursuers of that elusive grail, the Ideal Game, sometimes fall prey to similar delusions: if only they knew two more gamers so they could finally play **Kingmaker**; if only they had two PCs so they could play **Command HQ** in dual mode; if only, if only.

3-D Mode

In the real world, though, Ideal Games don't exist. Every style of gaming has advantages and drawbacks, and one of the advantages of *Strategy Plus* is that it offers us a varied menu, so we can sample each of a range of different delectations. Home computer games and boardgames are fairly frequently covered; as a veteran of both, I'd like to compare them with the less-known play-by-mail/play-by-modem (PBM) gaming, which adds a worthy third dimension to gamers' enjoyment.

PBM directly attacks the traditional limitations of gaming. Computer games are normally solo, and if they are not they rarely offer space for more than two or at most four human players. Learning how to beat the computer players in **Imperium** is satisfying, but compared with fighting human rivals it's still missing something.

Board and role-playing games, by contrast, are limited by your number of gaming friends and the number of people you can fit around your dining-room table, whichever is smaller. Moreover, unless you are living in a house large enough to boast a permanent games room, few games last more than an evening or two before you need the space for something else.

PBM games are simply games too complex or large-scale to be played at home, run by a central 'game master' (GM) with dozens or even hundreds of players across the country.

How PBM Works

Each player takes a part in the game universe, sending in orders to the GM, who processes interactions and sends back individually customised reports to each player. For this service (usually computer-processed, for obvious reasons), he's paid a 'turn fee', usually about £2-£3, in return for which you can expect hours of pleasurable agonising over your report. Increasingly, turns can be sent in by modem instead of post for those so minded, and the first games with all interaction by electronic mail are appearing (CompuServe fans will find several if they 'GO PBMGAMES').

One example is Rhann Games' **Legends**. Players receive two bulging rule books at the start. One details the fantasy world in which the game is set, and the myriad of factions, religions, and warring nations which are struggling for influence at the game's outset. The second describes the game system, and the scores of activities which your characters can get up to.

Underground cities, inns, magic guilds, fairs, slaves, barbarians, cloud castles, and many more colourful elements assail you until your mind reels, but at the start you merely choose from one of four position types, and then spend the early turns exploring what they can do.

As your position develops, you will become locked in rivalry and alliance with other players, your turn report will grow to 20+ pages, and your spare time will disappear down the plughole with alarming speed: it's not that you *have* to spend hours on every turn, but with so many options to choose from it seems a shame not to. Now few PBM games are quite as richly varied as **Legends**, and by the same token few are as complex and time-consuming. But all the best PBM games share a few characteristics:

The full-time GM: as his living depends on making you happy, you should be able to expect clear, well-tested rules and a smooth series of well-presented turn reports throughout the lifetime of the game.

The scale: there is no particular limit on the number of players which can be included in a PBM design: KJC's **Monster Island**, for instance, is designed to accommodate up to 3000 warring giants on a dangerous unknown island. This means that you can expect to encounter a wide range of opponents, from the incompetent to the expert, from the reliable allies to the cunning deceivers; between you, you make up a cast of characters unique to that game which will probably make it unlike any other.

The other main advantage of PBM gaming is its sheer convenience: it's ideally designed to enliven out the boring moments in your life. You can study your turn reports on the Tube; over breakfast; waiting for appointments...anywhere, in fact. You usually have a week or so to prepare your orders, allowing you to fit the game into whatever exotic (or mundane) lifestyle you pursue.

Galactic Empires

A major theme in PBM, as in home computer games, is galactic empire-building. Sloth's **Spiral Arm** is probably the most popular in Britain, with 50 players and a maniacal computer expanding out from single-planet bases in a race to grab raw materials and build space fleets before their neighbours. Like many PBM games, this can generate heavy diplomatic activity, with players frantically phoning their bordering rivals to find out if the alliance they made last turn is compatible with the massive warfleet which has suddenly appeared at Alpha Centauri.

Another classic, recently relaun-

Nicky Palmer has been gaming for 25 years, and wrote three of the few books about 'serious' games: *Beyond the Arcade*, *The Best of Board Wargaming*, and *The Comprehensive Guide to Board Wargaming* (which appeared in six editions in three languages). He designed the Spectrum Battle of Britain simulation Their Finest Hour from Century, and wrote for *Games & Puzzles* and *The Gamer*; he now publishes *Flagship*, the main British play-by-mail magazine.

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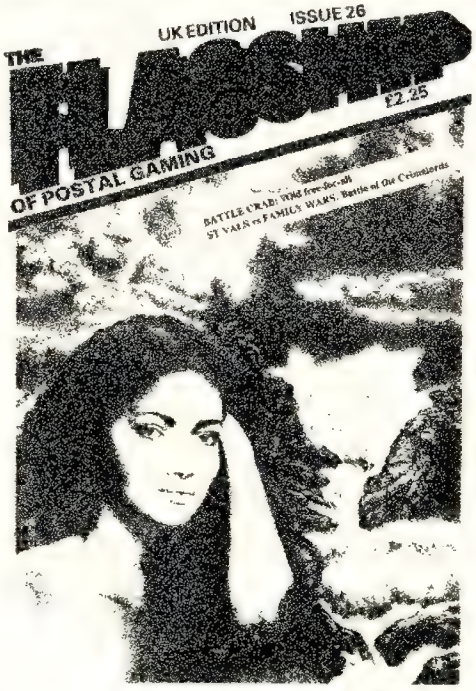
Now stop imagining: it's reality.

In Britain today, over 200 games are run by British professional gamemasters by post and modem for dozens, hundreds or even thousands of players all over the country (and Europe and America too). Themes range from far-flung galactic empires via savage civil wars to individual fantasy adventures to off-beat themes like movie-making and American Football management. Most are run by mail; an increasing number are available by modem too.

FLAGSHIP is the leading magazine of play-by-mail (PBM) gaming. Let us be your guide to the amazing dimensions of this expanding hobby.



* If you don't know anything about play-by-mail, send two second-class stamps for a free copy of ***The Guide to Postal Gaming*** (32 pages), which describes the hobby and contrasts 10 popular games

* If you'd like to know more about this exciting hobby, send £8 for an introductory 4-issue subscription to the magazine. Every issue is packed with news, reviews, and wide-ranging features, and all subscribers receive a sheet of discount coupons, worth many times the cost of the magazine!

* If you'd like to meet players near you who can tell you more about PBM, send £4 for ***Who's Who in PBM***, a survey of PBMers all over Britain (including notes on nearly every game currently available).

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_ _

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ched, is Time Patterns' **Starweb**: similar in basic concept to **Spiral Arm**, this has a smaller cast of about a dozen players, but each takes a different role. The Pirate seeks to ravish worlds of their wealth, and has special powers to capture fleets; the Berserker (as per Saberhagen) seeks to exterminate life, and can plant fast-breeding killer robots on enemy planets; the Artifact-Collector tries to build libraries of art treasures, and is happy to provide economic production to pay for them, and so on.

PBM SF offers more sophisticated designs than most computer games, probably because the record-keeping problem is largely dealt with by the GM. **Imperium** is probably near the limit of home computer complexity that most people are prepared to tolerate, and indeed it offers computer assistance with aspects of your empire which you may not wish to be troubled with, but there are numerous PBM games with similar levels of 'realism' which can be played quite easily, as the multiple-page reports with tables and (increasingly) graphics offer easier overviews than the computer screen, and order inputs are often made on fill-in-the-blanks forms generated to fit the situation.

Historical Wargames

By contrast, PBM wargames are not at the same level of realism as some computer wargames, and both are still left behind by board games. The main reason for this seems to be the multi-player element inherent to the PBM idea (a few two-player PBM games exist, but only have a fringe following). There aren't many historical multi-side conflicts, so PBM games usually feature some sort of abstract civil war free-for-all.

Team games are possible, but run into problems if one side has wimpish players who drop out when they lose a battle. The most sophisticated games are run by Historical Engineering, notably **Napoleonic Wars**, though their high-tech graphic turn reports carry a hefty £11.50 price tag. Other abstract games roughly rival the computer game **Empire**, but there's nothing to match the SSI/SSG lines in the board game tradition, let alone the high- quality interaction of **Command HQ**.

Fantasy Wargames

Against this, fantasy wargames see PBM in its element, with *Lord of the Rings* offering a generic backdrop to any number of designs. **Legends**, discussed above, is the most ambitious; **Adventurer Kings**, a more limited design, offers a very clever mix of military and adventuring options for a thrill-packed game lasting only around 15 turns. Since most fantasy scenarios have multiple factions (the evil emperor; the treacherous neutral; the holy warriors; the reflective abbots...), few home computer games offer much in this line, and the board-games which have attempted it like **War of the Ring** offer interesting but ultimately fairly repetitive play.

Role-playing Games

An exception to the usual computer moderation is offered by the hand-run (but usually computer-assisted) role-playing games. These give the character a role in a world with dozens or hundreds of others, giving an inherently richer experience than a game with six players at home, let alone the computer approximations like the Ultima series. One of the most successful is **The Apoch**, from Spellbinder, with two GMs offering well-written and often witty commentaries on the exploits of your character on a strife-torn fantasy world.

Exotic Themes

PBM has generated numerous exotic games, offering themes from film directing via mad scientists to secret agents.

One of the most successful games in Britain today is **St Valentine's Day Massacre**, a remarkable multi-layered simulation of Prohibition Chicago. At the start, you are a small-time gangster with a small underground brewery and an illegal dive; as the game develops, you discover that Chicago is honeycombed with multiple criminal networks and power structures, and acquire a sheaf of information sheets on nefarious activities from rum-running from Canada to brothel-keeping and loan-sharking. Almost every turn brings new revelations to think about, and the relentless pressure of the shadowy Murder Incorporated is almost as big a threat as your competitors. This is the game I most look forward to, and I'd expect it to appeal to anyone of the empire-building/planning turn of mind. SP

POINTERS

All the GMs mentioned above will send more information on request, or you can get a continuing broad hobby picture from *Flagship* magazine (£12/year from PO Box 1733, Handsworth, Birmingham B20 2PP – I edit this, so I'm biased), which lists 200 current games and provides reviews and features about the ones we think are best.

Adventurer Kings:
£6 rules and two turns, then £3/turn from Elite PBM, POB 374, Harpenden, Herts AL5 5DA

The Apoch,
£6 rules and two turns, then £1.95/turn, from Spellbinder Games, 6a High St, Wath-upon-Dearne, Rotherham, S Yorks S63 7QG

Legends:
£10 rules, then £2.50-£10 turn (depends on size of position), from Rhann Games, POB 12, Sarisbury Green, Southampton, Hants SO3 6YL

Monster Island:
free rules, then £1.75/turn, from KJC Games, POB 11, Cleveleys, Blackpool, Lancs FY5 2UL.

Napoleonic Wars:
£25 rules and one turn, then £11.50/turn from Strategic Simulations, PO Box 432, Leek, Staffs ST13 6HL

Spiral Arm:
£5 rules and two turns, then £1.75/turn from Sloth Enterprises, PO Box 82, Southampton, Hants SO9 7FG

Starweb:
£10 rules and four turns, then £2.50/turn from Time Patterns, 97 Devonshire Rd, Birmingham B20 2PG

St Valentine's Day Massacre:
£10 rules and five turns, then £1.50/turn (rising slowly for larger positions) from Rampage Games, 37 Beechwood, Woodlesford, Nr Leeds, W Yorks LS26 8PQ

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Rampage Games and Temple Games proudly present a new PBM game of High Adventure, exploration and warfare; of awesome creatures and potent magiks; of warring races guided by the Gods in pursuit of Their aims.....

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Imagine a world of epic proportions; of towering mountain ranges and vast forestlands; of barren wastelands and sleepy valleys. Imagine a world of breathtaking beauty; of sky-blue lakes and green pastures, and of golden plains as far as the eye can see and farther. And imagine a world where behind this peaceful scene lurks a festering evil intent upon its destruction and eternal damnation.

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Imagine a world of *pure fantasy* in the true, unblemished sense of the word.

Imagine Medokh's World.

SPECIAL LAUNCH OFFER

Rampage Games, in collaboration with John Duffy of Temple Games, have recently completed significant improvements and enhancements to our Play-By-Mail strategic fantasy wargame, *The Keys of Medokh.* To celebrate this grand event, we are *giving away* **2,500** of the high-quality Startup packs ***worth £10.00 each!!***

All you have to do is write to us with details of your race choice (listing Orcs, Kobold, Elves, Dwarves, Human and Halfling in order of preference), and state either 7, 10 or 14 day deadlines. Seven-day games are processed mid-week to ensure that you always have at least a full weekend in which to peruse the results, and these have to date proven by far the most popular. TKoM has been designed and written with players entirely new to Play-By-Mail in mind, so if the whole concept of postal gaming is something new to you, you'll never get a better chance to find out what it's all about - and all for free!

Upon receipt of your Race preference list we will send you a Ready-To-Play position in the first available 42-player game of your chosen deadline(s). In addition to your starting details and initial laser-printed map, you will also receive a copy of the Basic Rulebook, a Race Reference Card for your chosen race, a Terrain Identification Card, and your first A5-size Turncard -- all produced to a very high standard of quality -- plus £6.00 in Turn Credit (the equivalent of about *four* free turns). And all absolutely free with no obligation *whatsoever.*

We hope you'll take this opportunity not only to try the game for yourself, but also to join with friends: simply have them choose a race which compliments your own. Providing that you both / all choose the same deadline and mention to us that you'd like to be in the same game, we can ensure you are placed together in a special Ready-Alliance game. Write to:

TKoM Startup
RAMPAGE GAMES,
37, Beechwood, Woodlesford,
Nr. Leeds, W.Yorks. LS26 8PQ.
Tel: 0532 826633 (9am-9pm, Mon-Fri.)

Please mention where you saw this advertisement when applying for the special offer.

8-bits and pieces

I'm writing foremost as a reader who owns none of the games computers your magazine covers: IBM PC, Amiga, Atari ST. I currently own an Atari 800XL and have several wargame strategy and flight simulations for it but of course my 8-bit's getting old and I can't play on it any of the new, or even nearly new, flight simulations and strategy games currently available.

For this reason I'm writing to request any advice your magazine can give me on which computer(s) is the best available for flight simulations and strategy within £560 net, as new. My intention is to purchase through the pages of *Computer Mart* local ad mail or associated computer magazines classified listings. I've also a host of games I wish to buy, through ads in your magazine. I will definitely mention *Strategy Plus* because I believe it to be an essential magazine for the computer wargamer and flight simulator enthusiast. Your magazine is also the only one catering for computer strategy I know in existence.

J Dean Smith
Hall Green
Birmingham B28 0SN

For the time being I'd recommend a 1 meg Amiga. Look out later this year for Amstrad's new 286 PC. This will come with a VGA colour monitor. The projected price is around £700.

Solitary complaint

Where have you been? I have spent years looking for a mag like yours. I found issue 5 on the shelf of a newsagents. While I was looking for a model mag I bought it and when I got home read it from cover to cover. I am 30+ and find a lot of the mags around geared up for the kids. I thoroughly enjoyed this one. I have an IBM PC and I play a lot of board games and at the moment I am in the middle of a couple of PBM games, so an all round mag is what I need. What a delight to see yours. Please don't change a thing except, well, there has to be one. In your reviews of boardgames would it be possible to mention solitaire suitability. At times I find it difficult to get players together for any length of time, so I often play solitaire. I have a number of boardgames and most of them are for two or more players, but they lend themselves well to solitaire play. A scale like the one used by Victory Games would be nice.

M J Nicholls
Reading
Berks RG6 1AY

We will endeavour to make solitaire suitability clear in the review itself.

Market forces

I regularly bought *Games International* until its recent unfortunate demise. With the loss also of *Games Review Monthly* there appears to be little on the market for UK boardgamesrs. A sad state of affairs. Have you considered publishing in quarterly form? If this is not possible would you be able to collect the boardgame reviews from *Strategy Plus* and sell them bound together in some form every few months.

I recently bought issue 2 of *Strategy Plus* but unless you own a computer £1.95 for about 7½ pages of boardgame reviews is expensive. I'm sure there must be other *Games International* readers desperate to get boardgame material who would be willing to buy such a collection. I also notice your editorial staff is much the same as before *(Yes, I am – Production Editor)* so I assume you have not lost your interest in **Die Macher, Schoko & Co** etc. I hope you will consider my proposal.

Simon C Appleyard
Aberdeen AB1 6JU

There has been much moaning and groaning ever since we folded Games International. *To put an end to this I suggest the following: I will happily donate all our boardgames material, start up advice, and more contacts than Dateline, to anyone who thinks that they can produce a viable boardgames magazine, be it monthly, quarterly, or annually. The offer is now on the table: put up or shut up.*

Crash landing

Here is my vote of confidence for *Strategy Plus*. I was attracted to the ancestor magazine *Games International* because of my interest in boardgames and rolegames. I do not have a 16-bit computer but maintain an enthusiasm for the new magazine as much as for the old. This is because you have kept true to the style of GI, the core subject matter being very much the same. And, at least for me, you have succeeded in projecting the excitement generated by the silicon. Also, your reviews are spot on. They are the most accurate software reviews I have read, with a serious attempt to distinguish between objective and personal viewpoints; both of which I like. It is sufficient to say that your reviews are a major influence on my purchases, which once bought are taken to a friend where I make a nuisance of myself and beg computer time: thank you.

Can you help me with a problem. After reading your review of **Their Finest Hour** I bought it and was very pleased. However, after a while playing the game and compiling a lengthy rota of pilots (about 50) on my data disk, it crashes. This occurs nearly every time I try to access the data disk which in turn is corrupted. I use an Amiga with two disk drives; it crashes in both. I've written to the only British address I could find in the box but have had no response.

Continue the good work. Do not forget about the humble board game. And I'd like to end by saying that your mag has done what the Hard Sell failed to do: that is, to induce me to save for my own 16-bit machine.

J P Lisle
Dunston
Tyne & Wear NE11 9UE

Lucasfilms acknowledged that there is a bug in this area. The company is currently trying to exterminate it, and in the interim suggests that you back up your pilot rosters and not make them too big.

Power hints

An alternative, quicker and more fun way to conquer world (1,3) of **Powermonger** is possibly attack the two towns to the SE of the starting camp, aggressively get all men and food then call an alliance before the enemy army descends. Once it is encamped, send the army to collect all the boats until every man has one, attack a coastal town and when the army comes send your captain just off the coast. Your archers will massacre the entire army on the coast (it looks great all the angels flying!).

David Mason
Hartlepool
Cleveland, TS25 5QA

Harpooned

Ever since *Strategy Plus* first made its appearance in October 1990, I have been an avid reader of your magazine.

It has far outshone any of the other computer magazines in the quality of your reviews and absence of pages and pages of advertisements *(not that much of an absence – Ad Manager)*. Being a wargamer and ex-boardgaming enthusiast I am naturally interested in your strategy, simulation and boardgaming pages. It is thanks

Send your letters to:

STRATEGY PLUS
Lamerton House
27 High Street
Ealing
London W5 5DF

Or fax:

081-579 6485

to your reviews that I have recently been converted into a **Harpoon** fan and have also acquired a taste for computerised boardgames like **Blitzkrieg – Battle at the Ardennes**, by Internecine.

Like most of your readers I have become very frustrated at the unavailability of **UMS II** particularly as I like to design my own maps and armies. This will become headline news for most of the dealers, when it is finally released, as they must get pretty weary of advertising a game they cannot supply.

John Wise
Romsey
Hampshire SO51 7RG

Megaletter

I have bought the February edition of *Strategy Plus*, and am very pleased to see yet another computer magazine giving IBM PC games slight priority over Amiga and Atari ones.

My main objective in writing this letter is for some advice. Yup... that thing us kids need a lot of! Well you see, in my school, my art teacher, Mr Koenig, has made a brilliant boardgame called Megido. He made a superb board out of wood, and some well painted metal aeroplanes. The aim of the game is to bomb the other person's bases (using your bombers) which are guarded by fighters. A die is not required because he devised his own movement scale.

I have played the game with some schoolmates and we all agree; it is the best strategic boardgame we have played. So we asked Mr Koenig why he hadn't tried to publish it. His answer was simple: 'I have, but no company seemed to want it except for one or two and they said it was too expensive to make the counters.

Apparently he has tried to find someone who can make the counters in England, but it's no use. The cheapest place is China, but he can't afford the expenses to travel there. So, your job is to *please write back to me* with some advice and maybe give a few hints to some boardgame companies. Thank you for reading this.

Rounik Sethi (age 12)
London W13

Thanks for sending our favourite letter to date. In the cruel world of adults the best games do not always get published. However, if your beak wants to go it alone tell him to write to: Peter Beck, Lorenz GmbH, Postfach 1480, Elberstr 45, D-8192, Geretstreid, Germany. They can supply wooden pieces which nowadays are cheaper than metal or plastic.

Monkeying around

I wonder if anyone out there can give me some help with **Loom**? I bought it after completing the excellent **Monkey Island** game (with a couple of hints from others!).

I can't get beyond the twister – I know I need to untwist it, but as yet I can only play the first three notes. I seem to have wandered about everywhere, dyeing and opening everything I can. but I'm sure there must be something to do with the gold and darkness – what though? Is it with the first three notes?

If anyone could help me, I would be grateful. plus if anyone needs help with **Monkey Island** I am willing to give them some tips...

R A Parr
23 Devon Street
Cottingham
N Humberside HU16 4LZ

Storm on the ST

With regard to the letter by Dr P Billington in issue 6 concerning the increasingly slow development of wargames on the ST, I thought I should outline our company policy and give some insight as to why the problem exists.

The two titles mentioned, **Harpoon** by PSS and **Action Stations!** by us, are both 1 meg games and therefore could not be released for 512K machines. Our product could not be produced for 1 meg STs either, owing to the difference in memory usage between the Amiga and ST. Whereas we could fit it into 1 meg on Amiga, we could only get it down to 1.2 meg on ST. Even this is avoiding the argument of whether a 1 meg ST game is commercially viable, due to so few ST owners with 1040s or 0.5 meg upgrades.

Wherever we can, we intend to produce on ST. We will have a Napoleonic wargame out in the next couple of months for 512K STs (and Amigas). I would hope the ST could be supported in the future, but I have my doubts.

There is no doubt the US market plays an important part in what happens here, especially in the wargaming area, which is why we'll be setting up a US office in the coming months. If I were an ST owner into strategy product I would seriously consider upgrading direct to PC, because ultimately that's the way I think the market is going. If I had an Amiga, I would upgrade to 1 meg straight away for sure, then, from about the middle of next year onwards, I would start looking at PCs with VGA and hard drive. If all this comes back to haunt me, so be it, but that's my appraisal of the situation, and I'm sticking to it...for the moment!

John Ingram
Sales Director, Internecine
Wandsworth, London SW18 4TQ

Paper chase

On the strength of your mini review I have ordered **Megatraveller.** As I play CRPGs quite a lot and end up with 'tons' of scrap paper recording characters' attributes. How about a strategy mag producing a 'photocopiable' character levels sheet dedicated to a different game each month. Imagine one for the **Bard's Tale** series, where you can record important data or stats for a permanent record it certainly would be a first for any UK mag.

M J Harnden
RAF Güterslott
BFPO 47

Pomp and circumstance

The common denominator amongst the anti-war lobby, notably Clare Short, Tony Benn, and Bruce Kent with your editor bringing up the rear, seems to be a total lack of public comment for the dead, injured and tortured citizens of Kuwait. No reasonable human being likes war, but it is often the only option. And I wonder, what price now the Desert Storm/Shield game scenarios?

Another matter. Your esteemed former reviewer Mike Siggins probably plays games for their own sake, and has no wish to join the intelligentsia desperately seeking the **Boom Town** world title.

Mike Clifford
London SE19

Firstly, I am not part of any lobby, let alone bringing up the rear of such. To state the obvious; I would be opposed to any simulation depicting the dead, injured, and tortured citizens of Kuwait. Feel better now?

Regarding Mike Siggins: anyone pompous enough to be worried about his reputation in a gaming context deserves a kick up the bum. As would the 'intelligentsia', were it to exist. SP

OPPONENTS WANTED

PLAYERS WANTED for informal group, gathering at my home on occasional Sundays to play board games, eg **Kremlin, Shogun, Civilization** and the like. Professional people, age 25-45, who like pleasant surroundings, a glass of wine, a chat with their game, and not taking it too seriously! Please write to: Bob Roscow, 55 Fordhook Avenue, Ealing Common, London W5 3LS.

BOARDGAMES FOR SALE: SPI, Avalon hill etc. Must sell entire collection. many deleted titles. Send SAE for list to Neil Henderson, 5 Silverdale, Edgmond, Newport, Shropshire TF10 8HS.

FOR SALE: PC games: **Midwinter** £17, **Xenon 2** £10, **Monkey Island** £17, **Power Crash** (compilation) £12, **Blood Money, Conqueror, TV Sports Football, Pool of Radiance** £9. Price inc P&P. Originals only, as new. Will consider swaps, especially for Sierra/Microprose/Dynamix stuff. Write to: Ian, 30 Arran Drive, Frosham, Cheshire WA6 6AL. Also for sale: **AD&D** hardbacks and other RPGs and games. Send SAE for list.

FOR SALE: PC games software all on 3½". **Wing Commander** (Hi/den), **Renegade Legion, Loom, Midwinter**. All £10 each inc P&P. Tel 0908 379871.

BEER & PRETZELS GAMES WEEKEND

At The Brewhouse, Union St (corner of Station St), Burton-on-Trent, Staffs on Saturday & Sunday 18/19th May 1991. Opening times 10am-10pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun. Trade stands, wargames, boardgames, rolegames. Tickets £2.50/day, £4 for both, from Spirit Games, 98 Station St, Burton-on-Trent, Staffs DE14 1BT. For more details tel 0283 511293/34801.

FOR SALE: the following boardgames in very good condition: **Ambush** (VG Games) £12; **Turning Point: Stalingrad** (AH) £10. Plus the following SPI zip-bag games, all complete: **Conquistador** (1976) £6; **Star Force** (1974) £5. And finally, **Punic Wars** (SPI, 1975, *Strategy & Tactics* Folio Series) £4. All five games for £30. prices do not include post and packing. Tel Sheffield 681 702.

SALE OF GAMES for more space: **1849 American Goldrush, March Madness, Aviation, Spies, Blue Max, Kalahen, Onslaught, Sahara, Rollout, Air Charter, Election, Wizards, Dr Who** and many more in mint condition. Tel 0407 720895 for details.

FOR SALE: boxed games for sale or exchange SAE for list. Also Commodore 128/64 boxed plus software £120, 1541 disk drive – over 100 disks £100, **Action Replay** mk 4 £15. Write to R J Hankey, 15 Watlands Road, Bignall End, Stoke-on-Trent ST7 8QQ, tel 0782 720114.

FOR SALE: Complete run of SPI SciFi/Fantasy game magazine *Aries* complete with games £25. Also Commodore 64 with joystick (no tape deck) plus many strategy games: **Red Storm, D-Day, Midway, Evil Crown** plus many more £75 or will exchange for Le Mans Scalextric. G A Ashley, 3 Alfred Road, Brentwood, Essex CM14 4BT, tel 0277 260142.

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE: PC games, all boxed originals: **Falcon AT, Carrier Command, Blue Max, Silent Service I** and **II, Storm Across Europe, Corruption, F15 2, Populous, Indianapolis 500, 688 Sub, Battlehawks 1942, Fire Brigade, Waterloo, Lost Patrol** – £5 to £15 or buy/exchange **Kampfgruppe, Finest Hour, Frontline, Railroad Tycoon, Tank** or SimCan games. H G Whittaker, tel 0253 865806.

FREE! wargames, fantasy models, some ST software. I need the space for new stuff. Martin Edwardes, 1 Maiden Rd, London E15 4EZ.

BOARDGAMES FOR SALE: GDW's **Fire in the east, Fall of France, 8th Army**, AH's **Empires in Arms, Panzer Armee Afrika, B-17** and Sim Can's **Assault on Tobruk**. Wanted: GDW's **Operation Crusader**. David, tel 061-445 2240.

SOFTWARE FOR SALE: 18 boxed original strategy and adventure games consisting of: **Midwinter, Red Lightning, Conflict Europe, Waterloo, The Krystal, Populous, War in Middle-earth, MindFighter, Vulcan, Ports of Call, FireZone, Bermuda Project, Corruption, President Is Missing, MindShadow, Faery Tale Adventure, Suspect** and **Bureaucracy**. All Amiga format. The lot for £100. If interested contact Sean on 0233 640741.

WANTED: games software for PC compatible; RPG, adventure, strategy. No arcade. Also cheap business software wanted: must be originals. Contact Roland, tel 071-250 1910.

WANTED: Amiga strategy games: **Midwinter, Action Stations, Silent Service I** and **II, Supremacy, Gettysburg, Armada, Borodino, Full Metal Planete, Second Front** etc. Fair prices paid by recent Amiga buyer. Contact Dave Harrison, Lonsdale College, Lancaster University LA1 4YN

WANTED Amiga 500, with or without extras. Tel: 0273 779369.

FOR SALE (All IBM): **Home Accounts** (5¼); **Maniac Mansion** (5¼); **Ultima V** plus clue book (3½); **AH Civil War** (5¼); **Balance of Power** (3½); **Presumed Guilty** (3½). All £10 each inc P&P. G Lodge, 12 Coltbridge Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 6AE.

PSION DATAPAKS: a few 128K paks – formatted – £45 each. Tel: 0273 779369.

FOR SALE: Who's Had Who, Fury of Dracula, Oppression, Bottom Line, B-17, Blue Max, Dicke Kartoffeln, Chicago, Mille Bournes, Aviation (Gibsons 1950), **Careers, TV Wars**. All A1 good condition except **Aviation** tatty box. For details tel: 0407 720895. Also wanted English rules for: **Erdgas, In Der Falle, Playboss, Captain Future**. Will pay postage etc.

WANTED IBM originals: simulation/ strategy progs. Tel: 0273 779369.

AMIGA games for sale all at £10 (incl P&P) – **Gunship, Rocket Ranger, F29 Retaliator, F/A 18 Interceptor, Battlehawks 1942** and **The Hunt for Red October**. Also for the C64, SSG's **Carriers at War** on disk, £10. Contact Ken Fairclough, 68 Belfast Mead, Lyneham, Chippenham, Wilts SN15 4AQ.

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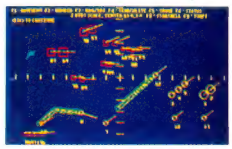
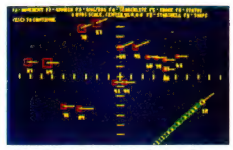


Battlelines engaging, while destroyers lay smoke.

Control guns in automatic or manual modes.



Scroll & change scales to "zero in" on the action!

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Seven levels of difficulty.

Accurate "Detect to Engage" sequencing.

Torpedo fire control computer.

Ships are modeled exhaustively.

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Ship classes.

Command ships individually or in formation.

Gunnery calculations.

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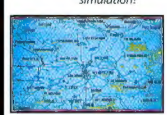

WHITE DEATH: *Detailed map showing battle sector around Velikiye Luki.*

HISTORICAL SIMULATION
A well designed historical simulation is always very satisfying conceptually but all too often extremely tedious in the execution. Storm Computers Ltd, in conjunction with U.S. programmers, have employed advanced personal computer technology to do for wargaming what the computerized spreadsheet did for accounting - most of the work and all of the calculations.

FEATURES:
Detailed full colour graphics
Realistic sound effects
One or two players
German saboteurs
Siegfried Line
Artillery supply
Terrain effects
Paratroopers
V-2 Rocket attacks
Play customization
Save Game function
Handicapping system for play balance
Weather Fuel Dumps
Aerial bombardment

HISTORY:
Early in December 1944 America and Britain were awaiting the return of its victorious armies in Europe. But on the other side of the Siegfried Line, Hitler had other plans, launching his last major surprise attack of the war - operation "Wacht am Rhein".

The plan was to quickly strike weakened Allied lines in Belgium and Luxembourg and to break through and move quickly to the Meuse to capture Liege and finally Antwerp. The capture of Antwerp was thought to be essential to postpone the invasion of Germany, giving the Fuhrer a chance to honour his promises of secret weapons which would win the war.

WHITE DEATH

Battle for Velikiye Luki, November 1942

FEATURES:
VERY sophisticated computer opponent
Six scenarios
Digitized sound effects (AMIGA)
Supply
Weather effects
Bunkers/Tank fright
Morale/Commandos
Rail movement/Rockets
Artillery spotting/Barrage
Headquarters/Garrisons
Unit Identification Support
Play by telephone

HISTORY:
The Russian Front, winter 1942. As the German Sixth Army slowly starves in the devastated city of Stalingrad, the Soviets have launched a second onslaught against the Wehrmacht.
In a communique which Moscow radio broadcast last night the Russians announced their objective: Encircle and destroy the German garrison entrenched at the vital rail junction of Velikiye Luki.

Lieutenant General Perkayev's Third Shock Army, reinforced with three separate corps have been assigned the mission.

It is understood that two under-strength but heavily fortified German divisions plus a number of rear area security and support troops defend the sector. All roads in this near-trackless wilderness run through Velikiye Luki. The stage is set for a bitterly fought battle on the cold snowy wastes of the Eastern Front.

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